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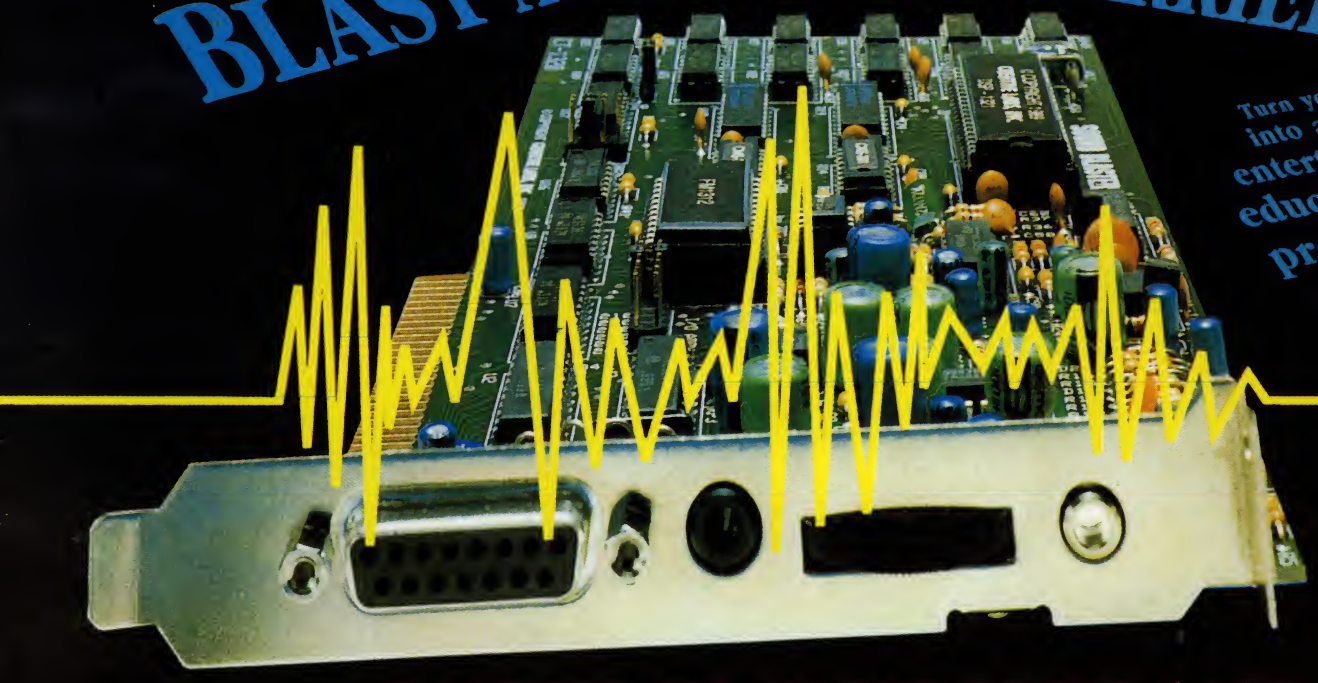

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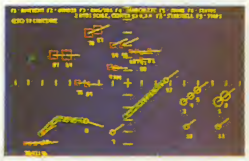

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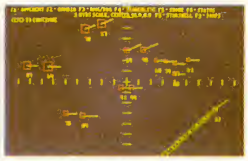

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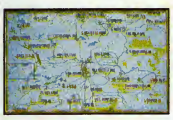

WHITE DEATH: *Detailed map showing battle sector around Velikiye Luki.*

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Realistic sound effects
One or two players
German saboteurs
Siegfried Line
Artillery supply
Terrain effects
Paratroopers
V-2 Rocket attacks
Play customization
Save Game function
Handicapping system for play balance
Weather Fuel Dumps
Aerial bombardment

HISTORY:
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WHITE DEATH

Battle for Velikiye Luki, November 1942

FEATURES:
VERY sophisticated computer opponent
Six scenarios
Digitized sound effects (AMIGA)
Supply
Weather effects
Bunkers/Tank fright
Morale/Commandos
Rail movement/Rockets
Artillery spotting/Barrage
Headquarters/Garrisons
Unit Identification Support
Play by telephone

HISTORY:
The Russian Front, winter 1942. As the German Sixth Army slowly starves in the devastated city of Stalingrad, the Soviets have launched a second onslaught against the Wehrmacht.
In a communique which Moscow radio broadcast last night the Russians announced their objective: Encircle and destroy the German garrison entrenched at the vital rail junction of Velikiye Luki.

Lieutenant General Perkayev's Third Shock Army, reinforced with three separate corps have been assigned the mission.

It is understood that two under-strength but heavily fortified German divisions plus a number of rear area security and support troops defend the sector. All roads in this near-trackless wilderness run through Velikiye Luki. The stage is set for a bitterly fought battle on the cold snowy wastes of the Eastern Front.

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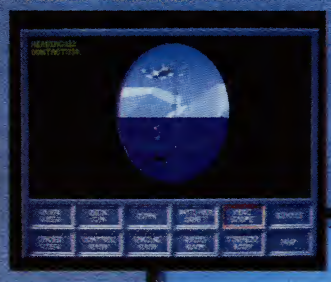

VGA periscope view of enemy aircraft

VGA 256 color mine field under North Atlantic

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STRATEGY PLUS

Number 5 February 1991

Cover: Blue Max – Aces Of The Great War, by Three-Sixty/Mindscape

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With five issues in the bag perhaps it's time to spell out our editorial policy and plans for the future. As should now be obvious this magazine is not published by some large combine, just as I am not Rupert Murdoch. The purpose of *Strategy Plus* is to provide a magazine for gamers, written and produced by gamers. Partly by necessity and partly by choice, we do not have a large team of staff writers. Most of our contributors are freelances. *All* are gamers. I don't want to make a big song and dance about only reviewing finished games (for one thing, the implication would be that we don't). The reviews should speak for themselves. Talking of which: in such a high tech industry as this it's easy to fall prey to the neophilia that is so much a part of it. But rest assured, no matter what platform or gaming mode prevails, the reviews will still be regarded in this quarter as the backbone of the mag. My view is that any magazine which can ensure your hard earned gaming pounds are well spent must be on a winner.

Converts

The magazine, being an inanimate form, does not have an opinion as to which is the best format. Individual writers, being human (I suspect) may have. So if, say, there appears to be a preponderance of PC games in the mag one month, that is probably because there were a lot of PC games being released that month. We just review whatever comes first. As to seconds, and even thirds, our plan is to provide a brief synopsis of the newly converted, together with a referral to the issue in which a full review appeared. The first example of this concept should appear in this issue. Any comments on this, and other features in the mag, would be most welcome.

In issue #6 we hope to include a comprehensive reader survey to enable us to find out where we are going wrong, and right.

And the games themselves? 1991 looks like being another great year. Products like **Sim Earth** and **Space Shuttle** look set to increase the prestige of computer games, and finally abolish the 'mindless' tag that has bedevilled the genre. Sierra On-Line even feels confident enough to parody that slur: **Oil's Well**, a new and rare arcade game from the company, is cheekily described on the pack as 'mindless computer entertainment'.

Home alone

One of the things I'd like to see in '91 would be an increase in multi-user (modem) games. There's no logical reason why such games should be restricted to commercial networks, or that commercial multi-player software should insist that players be in the same location. **Command HQ** (reviewed this issue) makes a start by promising an upgrade to permit play over LAN networks. Apart from being more fun, this mode of play would also make up for the limitations of computer opponents. And who knows, human opponents, even on the end of a telephone line, might stop boardgamers (charitable as ever) deriding computer games for their lack of sociability. Surely even a mediocre computer opponent is better than none at all?

But this is a battle that has already been won. Leisure software is the future, as all the recent boardgame conversions tacitly acknowledge. Exactly where this road is going to lead is as exciting as it is mysterious. And while not claiming to be the Pied Piper of Ealing, it is a road on which I hope you'll join me. SP

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UNIVERSAL MILITARY SIMULATOR 2

Nations At War

by Dave Morris

THE ORIGINAL **Universal Military Simulator** was designed to reproduce battles from any time in history. Fundamentally it was unsatisfying for the reason that all such 'generic' games are: the character of warfare has changed so much (particularly in the last hundred years) that no one single game system is able to adequately simulate all eras.

On the strategic level, happily, this is not quite as true. Generals still have to worry about motivating their men, marching them from battle to battle, feeding and supplying them. Allowance must also be made for those annoying factors (such as weather, politics and so forth) that are outside the command of the generals. This strategic aspect of warfare has altered in the emphasis given to each variable, but the overall picture comprises elements that would be familiar with anyone from Alexander to Stormin' Norman.

Less Frippery

The game looks less fancy than **UMS I**, which featured a stack of innovations (some more successful than others) including 3-D views of the battlefield. **UMS II** sensibly dispenses with any glitzy frippery and settles for a straightforward overview of the combat theatre which you can focus on at four levels, ranging from Group (numbers of armies over a very large area) to Divisional. (There is also a fifth option – the Global View of the war as it would be seen from an orbiting satellite. You may very well appreciate the ironic necessity of this if you stage a scenario in the post-Hiroshima age.)

Everything is run from menus handily pulled down from the top of the map in familiar graphic user interface style. Opponents and non-aligned states can be programmed with 'personalities' over a range of issues – how aggressive they are, how diplomatic, how prone to committing troops to battle, their preference for sea or land battles and so on.

More Detail

All extraneous factors are covered in exhaustive detail, including the precipitation, wind, supply and everything else you could reasonably ask for. While you are conducting your campaign, you may have to watch out for wavering allies as well as enemy troop movement. I didn't see any evidence of random factors such as plague or volcanic eruption affecting my Alexandrian dreams of conquest, but perhaps that sort of thing is just for the **Civilization** buff.

The three campaigns supplied deal with: Alexander's attempt to conquer everyone, Napoleon's to dominate Europe, and the Allies' to have a peaceful and Nazi-free life. A neat little touch is that if you choose the option of getting orders and reports printed out, they appear on 'stationery' of the day – for instance, the Macedonian notepaper has a hoplite heading and Grecian-style typeface.

Design Gulf

The game allows you to design your own maps and armies, of course, as in the original **UMS**. Surprisingly, there's no attempt to deal with the unconventional conflicts of history, so I cannot comment on whether Vietnam and others would be well handled by the system. It would be interesting to set up the Gulf situation, also, and try out an advance simulation. (That would have to be based on the limited information available at this time, of course – unless you happen to be the tea leaf who nicked that Whitehall geezer's laptop.)

The feel of **UMS II** is akin to one of those SPI monster boardgames – **Imperium Romanum**, say – but with all the options handled very neatly by menus and with all the tricky little extras like rivers flooding (which in a board wargame would be tucked away as Optional Rule 7.26.31c waiting to pounce on you when you're halfway through the game) dealt with by your friend the computer. Essentially it makes the pleasure of conducting a major military campaign accessible to a much wider group of players than would ever have mustered the patience to digest and embark on (much less finish!) a comparable board game. SP

WE LIKE...

Genghis Khan (PC, Amiga)

Storm Across Europe (All – hooray!)

Action Stations (PC, Amiga)

The Ancient Art of War (PC)

Team Yankee (All)

Designed by Intergalactic Development

Published by Microprose

Price £34.99 (PC), £29.99 (ST and Amiga)

Available for all formats
Reviewed on the ST

ST and Amiga versions of this game require 1Mb RAM

POWERMONGER

Environmentally Unfriendly

by George Crawshay

Designed by Bullfrog

Published by Electronic Arts

Price £29.99

Available for ST and Amiga
PC version in July
Reviewed on the Amiga

TO THOSE who have sampled **Populous**, produced by the Bullfrog team, the **Powermonger** screen will present a reassuring familiarity. Here we have the same system of a square of landscape terrain bordered by a set of icons, with a small map showing the full terrain available and the ability either to track slowly across the land or to jump from area to area. We see little figures marching about and we hear the sounds of their daily lives. We try to gain the upper hand in each territory and progress up the land ladder as the task becomes more difficult.

But there the similarity ends. The scenario in **Powermonger** is on a vastly more detailed level and the ingenuity of the programming is breathtaking. For instance, in some landscapes the action may be hard to see when hills block the view. No problem: you can just rotate the terrain. Sometimes you may wish to concentrate on a particular sections of the picture – again no problem: just use the zoom facility! In **Populous** the inhabitants were an anonymous collection: here they all have names and characteristics of their own.

The objective in each scenario of **Powermonger** is to control at least two thirds of the population, and this is achieved (or not, as in many of my attempts!) by a mixture of war and diplomacy. You start with a leader, a few men and a supply of food. During the course of the game you will come across various little settlements of different kinds and sizes, some rich in pasture land, some with workshops for constructing weapons, boats, pots or ploughs, some well disposed to strangers, other more aggressive. You will also have to be on the lookout for bands of marauders upsetting your carefully laid plans.

The Big Boss

All sorts of options are available: by dint of successful conquest and recruiting, the initial leader can acquire up to three lieutenants – a useful resource, because you're automatically defeated if the big chief dies. As in the real world, it's better to let someone else do the dirty work. Men can be transferred between leaders, whose 'posture' can be set to one of three levels of intensity, governing the way they carry out their various actions. Men can be ordered to fight, trade, recruit, forage for food, drop a cache of food or even give food away. If there is a workshop in the current leader's settlement they can be told to 'invent' (construct some of the artefacts mentioned above). What they make depends on the terrain and the leader's posture. If the men are really hungry they can even be ordered to zap a wandering sheep! This is done by pointing at the poor animal and issuing the command to attack, whereupon the men give chase and, if successful, form a circle around a flaming barbecue, with the leader uttering a satisfied burp of repletion.

While all this activity is going on, the leader's health, food supply and complement of men are monitored by bar charts above their heads. The land can be explored at will by clicking on the small map, which can be set to one of four modes: contours, objects, settlements or food. The game can be speeded up, slowed down or paused completely. The whereabouts of any leader can be found by a mouse click on the leader's face.

The weather must be contended with; it ranges from sunlit greenery to fierce blizzard (in logical order) which will affect important matters such as speed of travel and the availability of food, and you will have to try to keep the right balance between aggression and benevolence – killing off all your farmers and inventors can be counterproductive!

The inspired soundtrack is a great help; birds shrill alarmingly when trouble seems imminent, while the bleating of lambs announces the proximity of food. An invention command sparks off noises of vigorous sawing and hammering. It's even possible to gauge the likelihood of success of an order from the tone of your leader's response! This can range from an enthusiastic 'Yeah!' to a kind of muted 'Yurghh', which seems to convey unmitigated contempt for such a stupid command.

Inevitably, in a program of such complexity, there are niggles. Why, for instance, is the protection mechanism so incredibly complicated? The procedure involves matching up a map on the screen with one from the manual covering several pages. As there are four very small maps on each page this is tedious. Then one has to enter a number corresponding to one of six pieces of data about the map, but not straightforwardly – no, one has to point the mouse at tiny triangles raising or lowering a number for each digit. If it sounds boring on paper, I can assure you it is even more so in practice. Who on earth thought up such a ridiculous method? At the end of it all if you make a mistake you get a demo (feeble in the extreme) from which you can only exit by rebooting. Bad one, Electronic Arts: please rethink.

Which Icons?

The manual also leaves much to be desired. It would have been a great improvement if the silly mechanism described above had been dropped, and the space gained from excising the little maps used to print the icons corresponding to the actions being described on each page. As it is, one has to refer constantly back to one page to discover which icon means what, and since there are no less than 20 icons to remember this is quite an important factor for a beginner attempting to master the game.

A seeming omission in the programming should also be mentioned, as it is quite important. When clicking

with the mouse on a leader a board comes on screen showing his various attributes – food and men – but no matter how well equipped with weapons or other artefacts you know him to be, the legend 'Carrying' always shows a blank.

The last niggle concerns the critical business of knowing when you have won a territory. The manual says 'a territory has been conquered when at least two thirds of the population is under your control ... When the *Conquest* balance is tipped in favour of the white-and-blue shield on the right, it means two thirds of the territory's population is under your control.' The balance is a pair of scales, and to me the above sentence means that as soon as it tips to the right you are home. Not so! It has to be down at quite an angle, which makes the decision to retire a gamble, as you only know whether you have won after taking that decision. While accepting that the game is deliberately imprecise in many ways (such as variable reactions of the inhabitants to the various stimuli given them) I do feel that you should know whether you have achieved your objective *before* retiring.

Enough of niggles. The detail and complexity of the program should keep any lover of strategic games which allow one to play God happily occupied for weeks or even months. The graphics and sound are brilliant, as I've already mentioned. I only wish that I could give more useful insight into the actual play. However, I have to confess that so far I have not progressed very far up the ladder, so I would hardly be the best of teachers!

Finally, a recommendation to Electronic Arts which I hope might be constructive: I earnestly suggest that for future games or versions of this quite intricate game it would help immensely to have some kind of tutorial to illustrate the various options and, without giving too much away, to show examples of strategy and tactics in action. SP

We've got the power

Strategy in Powermonger, by Electronic Arts and Bullfrog

Taking the upper left world on the screen as (1,1), the one beneath it as (1,2) and the third one down (1,3), and (2,3) is two along and three down: here is a strategy guide for the first four worlds.

General Hints

Kill all sheep; the food they provide is vital to survival.

Invent only when necessary. Invention is an integral part of the game, but make sure that you do not spend too much time inventing fun things when the opposition may be building up!

Don't waste time! Your enemies will not sit back and wait: they are dynamic, thinking and cunning. If you are sightseeing, their armies may be massing!

Watch your food levels. There is nothing worse than having your army leave you in the middle of a battle because they are hungry!

World (1,1) – easy!

Attack ROPMMER passively

Retire

World (1,2)

Attack BRILLITTE passively

Get men and food

Attack HEACIDM passively

Get men and food (kill a couple of sheep here)

Invent aggressively, this will give you a cannon

Invent neutrally, this will give you swords

Attack BRININER passively

World (1,3)

Your army is equipped with bows at the start

Attack EMEEN passively

Get men and food

Because of the sheer number of red men on the map, the best gameplan is to wipe out JOSS XVIII, therefore preventing the armies remaining from getting any more orders. So, find and kill JOSS XVIII

Once this has been done, it's a matter of conquering villages passively until you have enough men to defeat the capital. Don't forget to keep enough food to sustain your men

Attack the capital

Retire

World (2,3)

Attack BEEME passively

Get food and men, kill all the sheep around

Attack FEBOY, LICEM and EMGGS passively, remembering to get food and men at each, and kill any sheep encountered

As soon as EMGGS is defeated, get men and food and run away as the red army will appear and start to chase you

Find somewhere to recuperate

When the red army catches up with you, attack them aggressively

Mop up any deserters

When the scales look sufficiently balanced in your favour, retire.

That's the guide to the first four worlds: it serves as a good taster as to what is to follow. Remember that as you progress, don't just conquer all the villages and towns, try out spying, trading and forming allegiances. SP

MUDS

Mean Ugly Dirty Sport

by Ralf Kahlert

MUDS is a simulation of a sport that doesn't exist. The action takes place on the equally nonexistent continent of Ghold. Many different alien races live together there. Prisoners on Ghold are offered the opportunity to embark on a sporting career as a **MUDS** player.

MUDS is played with flonks (small pterodactyls). They are alive and can even be bribed. At each end of the playing field is a so called flonkpot, into which the flonks must be placed. A water-filled moat separates the pot from the playing field. There are two ways of scoring points. You can either throw the flonk into the pot for 1 point, or you can jump into the moat and place the flonk directly in the pot for 2 points. This is dangerous, though, because there is a nasty carnivorous creature swimming in the moat. The flonk can be carried or passed without restrictions, but the opposition will do anything to get possession.

Fouls can occur only in the midfield area of the playing field. Near both ends any sort of fighting is allowed.

The coach (you) can call any number of timeouts. He then can change tactics and substitute players.

Each team may consist of up to 13 players. Only five of them are on the field at the same time though. The field players divide into three groups: there are two DEFENSE players, two ATTACK players and one CENTER player. Any mix of races is allowed in the team, but each group must be made up of players of the same race. If one team doesn't meet this requirement (players can die during a game), it automatically loses the game.

This means there are two ways of winning a game of **MUDS**. You must either have more points than the opponent at the end of the game (the game ends when seven flonks have been used) or you must push the number of players in the opposing team below the required minimum.

During a game you can either take control of one player (via mouse, keyboard or joystick) or let the computer handle everything. If computer control is chosen you just sit back and see the action unfold (rather like watching TV). The sprites are nicely animated and fun to watch. Timeouts can still be called where you can give the computer limited tactical instructions. How well your team does depends very much on the characteristics of the individual players.

After booting up the game there is a choice of just playing one game of **MUDS** or playing the campaign game. In the campaign game the objective is ultimately to win the coveted Ghold Cup. This entails travelling through four different regions and defeating the four local teams of each region.

The game starts in the city of Gorden. Each of the 16 cities that must be visited has a different layout, but basically the services are the same in each. The team has to sleep somewhere: choose from three hotels of different quality. Then there is a bank, a loan shark, a healer, a tavern, the **MUDS** stadium, a betting office, a city chronicler (where the game can be saved) and a slave market (where players can be bought and sold).

Every player is rated for intelligence, strength, morale, stamina, speed, skill and health. These values differ from race to race and also from individual to individual. Selection of the most useful players for a team is perhaps the most important part of the game.

Sounds all very interesting, doesn't it? The comprehensive manual makes it easy to get into the game. The graphics are funny and original and there are lots of them (each of the four regions has a different sets of graphics). Every region has different aliens and slightly different playing fields, so there is high motivation to see it all. The digitised sound effects are some of the best I've ever heard from my PC speaker.

It took about 18 hours of playing time for my team (the famous MR. ED'S WALKERS) to complete the game by winning the Ghold Cup. A lot of the options (such as bribery) weren't really needed to complete the game. The managing part can get pretty boring after a while when a routine has been developed of what to do and what not to do. The tactical choices during a game aren't very complex either. And once you realise that some races don't get eaten by the moat monster (or is that a program bug?) you can build up an almost unbeatable team.

So, what does happen when you beat the last team? If you want to find out for yourself, then skip the next paragraph. Well, you get to play a very strange final match. (Take a very close look at the map, there is a new location!) Maybe it's a bug in the program, but my opposition got sent off the field after 60 seconds of play. After this easy win I got to see a picture of the Ghold Cup. And that was it! Somehow I had expected a bit more.

Was it fun to play? Yes. Is there any replay value? Probably not. I would have preferred a more open-ended game with a 'real' league mode (maybe similar to the NFL, with four divisions, playoffs and so on). As it is there isn't much point in playing it again, because there is no way to improve your performance. All in all **MUDS** is a very well produced fantasy sports simulation, but with no long-term appeal. SP

Designed by
Holger Ahrens, Volker Marohn & Gisbert Siegmund

Published by
Rainbow Arts

Price £24.99

Available for all formats
Reviewed on the PC

EGA, VGA

Joystick, mouse or keyboard interface

CARTHAGE

Chariots In The Mire

by John Scott

YOU ARE Garrison Commander Diogenes, born in 170BC and brought up amid stories of brave warriors who fought with Hannibal and his father against the might of the Roman Empire. Now Rome is a threat once again and, jealous of Carthage's re-emergence as a commercial power, the Empire has dispatched a vast army to smash Carthage to the ground.

In this game the player must play the part of Diogenes and do all in his power to halt the invading armies. It won't be easy – the actual outcome of the Third Punic War was a crushing defeat for Carthage when Publius Scipio overran the city in 146BC. The population of Carthage – reduced to 50 000 at her final surrender – was sold into slavery and eventually the city was utterly destroyed. Why should it be different this time?

Well, the goddess Tanit has bestowed on Diogenes the Power of Sight, a psychic gift which enables him to see the positions of the invading forces in his mind's eye. This intelligence is what might save the day. Diogenes has convinced General Hasdrabul of the reality of his visions and has been given the task of distributing wealth to cities throughout the land with which to build and control armies to halt the Roman advance.

Fractals, Romans And...

Once the game loads, the player is presented with a fractal generated map of the Carthaginian territory showing the positions of cities and hostile and friendly forces. Diogenes begins in the city of Carthage but he must quickly speed his chariot to other cities to create armies which will either stay and guard the city or advance to meet the Romans. Speed is of the essence, as the Romans begin their advance after five minutes (real time) into the game.

The player can have a maximum of five mobile armies under his control, each consisting of no more than 30 battalions (cavalry, infantry and archers). Each battalion may contain no more than 99 men. The average Roman army has about 2500 troops.

Elephant Hunt

You may remember that the most famous Carthaginian of them all, Hannibal, launched the Second Punic War in 218BC when he crossed the Pyrenees and Alps, and that he did rather well at first because of his use of elephants. Well, elephants are still around in this Punic War, along with catapults. Neither of these military assets can be bought or sold, but as they are scattered around various cities it would be a good idea to get to them before the Romans do.

As armies tire, they can rest by the roadside, but it is advisable to keep their strength, experience and loyalty as high as possible. This is done mainly by winning battles. In addition to the struggle on the mainland, Carthaginian merchant ships run round the Roman blockade bringing cash for Diogenes to distribute. Should he be taken captive he will be held prisoner until Carthage can afford to pay his ransom. If the Romans enter Carthage, the game is lost.

Almost all of this strategic side of the game (movement and combat) is carried out by the mouse 'click and drag' method. Whichever side has the most troops and equipment can be expected to win, with the condition of the troops an important factor.

Gilty Secrets

If this was all there was to **Carthage,** I would probably have said that it was a fairly acceptable little wargame, though perhaps a bit dull. Graphically the game can be slightly confusing at first, as the text on the game menus attempts to simulate an antique gold gilt on marble. In practice, this just makes them fairly illegible. Sound is dominated by an atmospheric tune which is OK for the first 50 or so times you hear it. Since there is no option to turn it off, and since it continues throughout the game, I reckon that most people will be reaching for the volume control after that.

However there is more to the game – an added extra which in my opinion really destroys it. This is the arcade sequence which must be played (endured?) every time Diogenes moves from one city to another. It is most like an **Out-Run** type of car race game: Diogenes and his money speed along pretty Carthaginian roads, trying to avoid rocks and logs on the road. When he hits one of these obstacles his chariot may be damaged and he loses some of his money.

Occasionally he encounters a Roman charioteer, and at this point the scene is viewed from overhead. Then the combat is resolved by whip fighting and deft use of sharp spiked hubs on the chariot wheels.

I have to say that the graphics and sound in these sequences are very well done, as one would expect from Psygnosis. However, it all becomes so repetitive and boring that after a few plays I just couldn't be bothered any more.

I really don't know why software companies feel this need to ruin their strategy games by throwing in irrelevant arcade sections. At least this time they didn't try to sell a T-shirt as part of the package! SP

Designed by
Dave Worrall & Geoff Bramfitt

Published by
Psygnosis

Price £16.99

Available for ST and Amiga
Reviewed on Amiga

BLITZKRIEG

Battle At The Ardennes

by Sandy Eisen

BLITZKRIEG was originally written for the Commodore Amiga in 1987. The high quality graphics of the original are now available on an IBM with a VGA display and this is the version which is now reviewed.

Blitzkrieg is a computer simulation of a board wargame on the topic of the December 1944 German counterattack in the Ardennes forest, often called the Battle of the Bulge. This subject is ever popular among wargamers as it represents the last occasion when German forces attempted to seize the initiative from the allies. There are so many board wargames on this topic that a new one requires genuine novelty to attract real notice. **Blitzkrieg**'s claim to fame rests with it being the first Bulge board wargame designed to be played on a computer, rather than with counters on a hex map.

This game is similar to **White Death** and comes from the same US software team: Command Simulations. **White Death** appears to be a descendent of **Blitzkrieg**.

Game Mechanics

The boardgame mechanics are fairly conventional with alternating fixed turns. There is a rigid sequence of play including air bombardment, movement, combat and artillery selection, and finally combat resolution. This last phase starts with artillery fire which always reduces the target's strength, and continues with combat followed by any advances or retreats required. Although the concept of zones of control is not explicitly defined, ZOCs do block retreats and so surrounded units forced to retreat will be eliminated. All units which end their move next to the enemy must attack. The Allies (only) may use artillery for defensive support.

The terrain effects chart and combat results tables are given in the manual. There are five types of terrain: clear, road, mountain (usually called rough in other Ardennes games), forest, and Siegfried Line (which the Allies cannot enter – ever!).

The units display their combat strength value and movement allowance. No historical designations are given either on the units or in the documentation. An icon indicates whether a unit is armour, infantry, motorised infantry or artillery.

The supply rules seem reasonable with a fair amount of detail, such as differing effects on different types of units being out of supply for various periods. These calculations and effects are all handled automatically by the computer, although players do need to be aware of supply sources and path length restrictions.

The Interface

The game interface requires the use of a mouse. It is very similar to that in **White Death** with a single menu called up by a keystroke, and use of the space bar is required to move (one way only) through the options listed. It is a pity that the mouse cannot be used to make menu selections, although the mouse implementation on the maps is excellent.

The graphics are clear and attractive representations of a conventional hex grid map which can be accessed at three scales. The detail map shows full information on a small area and scrolls well. The mid scale map displays unit locations and ZOCs clearly over an area approximately 20 by 30 hexes and is most useful for planning moves. The big picture map shows the entire play area but units are small dots which can be missed. The program allows easy movement between the maps so that any desired area can be found.

Movement of units involves the use of a 'raster' or holding area into which units can be collected, and from which they can be deposited back onto the map provided the requested hex is indeed a legal move. There are many clever and well implemented features in the game interface. Once these are understood the game becomes easier to play and one is even more impressed with the programmers' efforts.

The counter graphics are clear, but not to my personal taste. The counter and map graphics in **White Death** are both superior.

Learning To Play

Running the program leads via title and copy protection screens to a series of very impressive initial configuration screens. These permit players to adjust the degree to which enemy units will be hidden in various terrain types, change the level of reinforcements for both sides, or chose to play with random (and unknown) weather rather than historical. Selections allow two human players to play against each other, or the computer can play Germans or Allies.

I had hoped that my familiarity with the similar (but different!) **White Death** interface, together with long experience with paper wargames would permit me to start playing **Blitzkrieg** fairly quickly. I was disappointed, and soon realised that the manual was needed for more than finding the key word to pass the copy-protection screen.

Continued page 17

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Published by
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WAR IN MIDDLE EARTH	17.99	24. 99
WAR OF THE LANCE	19.99	29.99
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'NAM

Design notes and strategy, by Matthew Stibbe

VIETNAM was called the first television war. Although it is less obvious, it may also be termed the first computer war. The United States used computers on a wide scale – to predict the consequences of proposed decisions, to simulate the effects of various kinds of weapons and tactics, and to experiment with various war-winning or war-containing strategies.

The Vietnam war was also unusual because it was fought as much on the 'home front' as on the ground in South East Asia. It was public opinion that brought the war to an end. Although it may not have been truly decisive, Walter Kronkite's reports from Saigon during the Tet offensive in 1968 marked a turning point in the public perception of the war. So it was truly a political conflict, and one that contemporaries thought could be modelled mathematically.

This is my justification for producing a simulation of the war in its entirety – both military and political. The simulation engine that drives the game **'Nam 1965-1975** is a complicated model of US and South Vietnamese politics. There are dozens of variables, and they interact subtly and (I hope) realistically. It is designed to accurately reflect the actions of the user in a historical mirror. The player can deviate greatly from what happened historically, and the models should reflect the consequences of the player's decisions as if they were the historical ones taken. So, for example, if the player decides not to send in ground troops to South Vietnam in 1964 as Johnson did, then the game should respond as if this was a real historical decision. This is why I call the game a historical laboratory. In this article I hope to describe how the game simulates historical reality, and how I arrived at the final design.

The game consists of two separate but interlinked arenas. The first is the military. This displays maps of South Vietnam, and parts of North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. On these maps you control your army units, and those of the free world allies such as Australia, Thailand, and Korea that sent ground troops. This operates much like a conventional wargame (with a few changes to take account of the peculiar nature of the ground war). Although what happens 'on the ground' can greatly affect politics, this article concentrates on the second area – that of politics. The politics of the game is presented in the form of a presidential report, with the player taking the role of the president. You are asked to determine the level of ground troop commitment to the war, the level and distribution of air power, and so on. All these decisions are logged, and are taken into account by the model.

There are three main indicators of your success and potential in the game. The formulae are shown the box, opposite. The first I have termed 'Patriotism', which essentially indicates your electoral popularity, although it also encompasses Senate support, and international opinion. It is a measure of your success at managing the war – of containing your losses, conducting successful military operations, and avoiding disasters. Your popularity is most dependant upon your 'Commitment'. This is a measure of the scale of your involvement in the war. Committing ground troops has a higher commitment cost than air power, and this in turn is more 'expensive' than giving economic and military aid to the South Vietnamese Government. Finally, your 'Available Commitment' is the level of commitment that is currently tolerable given your popularity. These variables are amalgams of many others.

A final crucial variable is SVN Stability. This is a measure of the political and military security and stability of South Vietnam itself. It is governed mainly by the level of US commitment, its success in prosecuting the war, and its control of the populace.

The relationship between the variables in figure 1 is not a simple linear one. The effects of some events are delayed, and often a high commitment can be initially unpopular, and then lead to a turn around in the military arena, leading to a rise in popularity. On the other hand a slow build up, as actually happened, followed by an ignominious withdrawal leads to a catastrophic decline in morale and popularity. Once your available commitment becomes negative you *must* withdraw units or face massive domestic instability and possible impeachment.

The historical American strategy in Vietnam was essentially a military one. Political aims were not very well articulated at the time, and socio-political policy on the ground in Vietnam can be best characterised as an ad-hocracy with numerous aid programs competing with one another, the military, the South Vietnamese Government, corruption and of course the communists. Unfortunate-

'Nam 1965-1975 will be published by Domark for the ST, Amiga, PC and Apple Mac in April of this year

Sample formulae:
SVN Stability, Patriotism, and available commitment.

```
gGameInfo . svnStability =(int)(
(float)gGameInfo.usEconComm +
      ((float)gGameInfo.newCommitment - (float)gGameInfo.initialCommitment) * 4 +
      ((float)gGameInfo.popControl + kInitialPopChange ) * 2 +
      (float)gGameInfo.svnLeaderPop * 5 -
      (float)gGameInfo.strengthOfMilitary * 0.25 +
      ((float)gGameInfo.usMilSuccess / 2));
gGameInfo.LastYearSvnStability = gGameInfo . svnStability;

gGameInfo . usPat =(int)(
      ((float)gGameInfo.initialPatriotism +
      (float)gGameInfo.svnStability +
      (float)gGameInfo.usMilSuccess +
      (float)gGameInfo.svnLeaderPop +
      (float)gGameInfo.spareUsComm * 0.2 -
      ((float)gGameInfo.totalUsComm * 2) ) / 2);
gGameInfo.lastYearsUsPat=gGameInfo.usPat;

gGameInfo . availableUsComm =(int)(
      ((float)gGameInfo.outrages * 10 ) +
      (float)gGameInfo.usMilSuccess / 2.5 +
      ((float)gGameInfo.initialPatriotism / 1.75) +
      (float)gGameInfo.svnStability / 7.5);
gGameInfo . histUSCom [0]=0;
gGameInfo . histUSPop [0]=0;
```

ly for the Americans, Communist strategy worked on a political rather than a military level. Armed struggle was a means to an obvious and widely supported end. Below is a list of potential strategies that you can try out in the game against the historical circumstances to see if you can do any better.

Blood and iron

The strategy is closest to the one that the Americans tried from 1965-9. To implement this strategy commit as many ground troops and reserves as you can get away with, support them with as much strategic bombing and interdiction as possible. Use ARVN and FWA troops in 'liberated' areas and try to smash the communist infrastructure, and military forces before you popularity goes through the floor.

Vietnamisation

This strategy was introduced under Nixon with the aim of letting Asian boys fight Asian wars, and easing the financial and human cost of the war on the American nation. It involved giving vast amounts of aid, both military and political to the South Vietnamese government, and building up the efficiency and strength of their armed forces. Optionally, such a strategy can be supported by massive use of US air power to support the ARVN. Be aware that this strategy requires South Vietnam to be relatively stable, otherwise its armies will grind to halt in a miasma of graft and incompetence, and all your investment will be wasted.

Economic warfare

This involves trying to buy out the South Vietnamese population, while maintaining the smallest military presence possible. The money will be spent on pacification and social projects. This is, of itself, not an entirely successful strategy, but it is a useful tactic when your popularity decline forces you to withdraw units. It is also a useful plan if you have been successful in overwhelming the communists but not in achieving enough military success to win the game.

Air land battle

Air mobility was a relatively new concept in the 60s. Now it forms a central plank of American and Nato strategy. You can try out the effect of air mobilisation on a large scale in South Vietnam by air mobilising large numbers of units and then committing them to South Vietnam. You should aim to use these troops more effectively than conventional troops so that this added efficiency compensates for the extra commitment cost. You should try to air mobilise the most efficient and powerful units, and consider such units élite troops. One interesting military tactic would be to use ARVN units as bait, and then when they are attacked move in an overwhelming number of high speed airmobile units and defeat the enemy.

Static defence

Static defence means the defence of key strategic targets – ports, and major cities – with the smallest possible commitment. This strategy requires a large commitment of reserves to replace the inevitable losses that such a strategy will cause. Importantly, this strategy does not require large airmobile, air power or unit commitment. It is, however, a strategy of last resort.

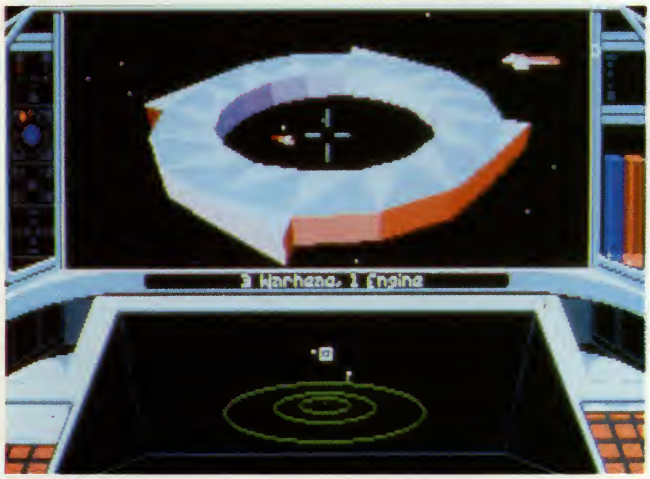
Napoleon once said that on the battlefield the moral is to the physical as three is to one. I hope that I have illustrated in my game, and in this article that, at least in the Vietnam war, it is the political that is to the military as three is to one. I hope that my game does not glorify or trivialise this horrific war, but instead allows people to explore what is possible and not possible with military action, and its relationship with public opinion in a democracy. Given the situation in the Gulf, I think that this is an important lesson to be learned. SP

Matthew Stibbe is an undergraduate historian at Oxford University. He has been interested in the Vietnam war for nearly six years, and his game 'Nam has been under development for four. His last game Imperium was recently published by Electronic Arts

LIGHTSPEED

Interstellar Action And Adventure

by Marcus L Rowland



LIGHTSPEED is big. You just won't believe how big. Big distances, big starships, big universes and a cast of thousands. Comparisons with **Elite** are inevitable, and to an **Elite** pilot the game sounds ideal: 256-colour graphics and sound (if you have the right boards), and more emphasis on trade and contact with aliens.

In **Lightspeed** the player is the captain (and only occupant) of a gigantic Trailblazer starship. Your mission is to explore strange new worlds and bring back goodies that can be used to prepare new human colonies, urgently needed because Earth has gone down an ecological plug hole. This involves mining, trading with aliens, and making alliances that will hopefully keep the new colonies safe in the future.

Simulation

Most of the advertising for **Lightspeed** has described it as a starship flight simulator, which is a pity because the game really revolves around economics and diplomacy; the flight simulation and combat are there because you have to go out and explore all the alien systems, and because the best way to gain a reputation as a worthwhile trading partner is to kick a little ass. Unfortunately you can never be quite sure if today's salvaged debris is going to be a mortal insult to tomorrow's vital allies. Strategy is more like the Star-Web PBM game or **Diplomacy** than **Elite**; an attempt to balance long-term goals that are often contradictory. Anyone who buys it thinking that they'll spend all their time blowing away alien gooks is in for a fairly short and disappointing game.

That said, how does the flight simulation aspect work? At first sight it's a little anticlimactic. The ship is about as manoeuvrable as the Titanic, and an **Elite** player's first reaction is to laboriously aim its nose at an attacker, fire a shot or a missile, then lumber around to aim at the next target. This is about as exciting as watching ice melt, and totally futile if targets are out of range of your weapons. Things improve dramatically when you get familiar with the differences from **Elite**. As targets get closer you can switch to a turret and zap them with a more mobile blaster, though this only works on small targets.

Complex

Missiles add more options, because they are either automatic (with low damage) or act as remotely-piloted fighters or kamikaze bombs. Toggling between the cockpit, turret, and one or more piloted missiles doesn't give you much time to think, and there are only ten aboard, so they should be used with caution.

Combat can get very complex if you are taking on several enemies in different attack modes. If the ship is damaged, randomly selected engineering systems are knocked out, and performance degrades. You can take a few seconds to make repairs, but this isn't usually a good idea in the middle of combat. Fortunately spares can sometimes be salvaged from enemy vessels after your 'glorious' victories. These components are important trade goods, and there may occasionally be a temptation to sell parts that should really be saved. Of course, if market conditions are right you can make a real killing.

Holographic

On-screen displays in combat include damage control indicators, a circular '3-D radar' that's rather like the **Elite** equivalent but adds a zoom feature and target identification, a 'holographic' 3-D view of the enemy ship (useful for assessing damage), and various gauges. There are also some decorative 'instruments' that don't really seem to do anything at all. Control is by keyboard, joystick, or mouse. Joystick is best for combat, the mouse for engine repairs and other intricate operations. Fortunately you can have both in use at the same time. As usual all of this looks best on VGA, though EGA is entirely acceptable.

The 'peaceful' alien contact aspect of the game assumes an oddly stylised form. If you are visiting an inhabited system you always emerge near an alien space station, and make contact by firing a probe at it. The aliens respond by sending you a picture of an official and some pretty scenery with a message, usually a formal greeting. The program gives you a choice of responses, each leading to new messages. These are mainly propaganda about the other alien races, occasionally useful items of information, and offers to trade if you have something useful to sell.

Sometimes the concepts expressed really are alien; I'm still trying to understand one message that apparently offered me a chance to swap my home base for a time machine. I think that the influence of Sandy Petersen (author of the **Call of Cthulhu** rolegame) may have something to do with their 'realism'.

Designed by
Sandy Petersen & Andy Hollis for MPS Labs

Published by
Microprose

Price £39.99

Available for PC

CGA, EGA, MCGA, VGA, Tandy

Supports mouse, joystick, most sound boards

Uninhabited systems can be mined; the ship carries three automated stations, and they are set up by selecting a planet and pressing 'M' to mine. All you ever see of alien planets is a featureless globe and a list of resources; the game is set entirely in space. It's a little abstract, but no more so than many boardgames.

Ark Royal

Lightspeed offers two game universes: the first has twenty systems; the second, fifty. This may not sound like a lot, but they are mapped in 3-D (the rotating 3-D starmap is gorgeous) and there is usually enough fuel to make only three or four jumps. You can get more by trading or, for the truly desperate, blowing away a space station and salvaging it. This is about as survivable as taking on the Ark Royal in hopes of nicking a few gallons of jet fuel.

Each of the 25 alien races has its own starship and station designs, distinctive style of message, and pictures. I wouldn't be surprised to see Microprose offering extra universes in due course, but the game is complex enough that it'll be a while before anyone really needs them.

There's a price to be paid for this size; like other recent releases the game prefers a high-specification machine, an 80286 or better with 640k (if you want VGA graphics) and preferably a hard disk with 1.56 megabytes of spare space. It can be run from floppies, but it isn't easy. A lot can probably be deleted (for example, there are various duplicate programs for EGA and CGA and so forth), but Microprose hasn't provided an installation program to make things easier.

Fortunately Microprose has taken one very welcome step: it has ditched the awkward key disk system used by earlier programs, leaving a relatively sane level of copy protection based on key words from the manual. This is actually more liberal than most other key word systems, letting you practice combat even if you don't know the correct word.

Potential

I was lukewarm to **Lightspeed** at first, because I was expecting something rather different, more like **Elite** and other simulators. Once I appreciated the diplomatic aspects and played with kamikaze missiles and fighters I got a lot more enthusiastic. It has a lot of potential for long-term enjoyment, and my guess

I WELCOME YOU, FRIEND EARTHMAN. LET US PLOT TOGETHER.
AND THIS STAR CLUSTER SHALL BE OURS TO SHARE BETWEEN
OUR TWO SPECIES.
FIGHT
LEAVE

is that even the small universe will take a week or two to explore. Negative aspects are the system requirements of the game, and slight disappointment with the exploration and mining aspects.

Some of the graphics (such as a long sequence for the return to home base) add nothing to game play, and the programming they represent might well have been used more productively elsewhere. Overall it's thoroughly enjoyable game, though appealing to a rather more analytical mind than other simulators. I'll probably keep it on my hard disk, which is more than I'll say for most games. SP

Blitzkrieg review, continued from page 12

My mistake was to forget that all board wargames require time invested in reading the rules before they can be played. In addition the sophisticated interface had its own nuances to be learned.

Do not expect to learn to play **Blitzkrieg** without reading the manual carefully.

Playing The Game

Quite a while later I restarted the program, selected default intelligence and reinforcements, chose hidden weather and elected to play the Allies against the computer. The initial German attacks devastated my weak front line. There are detailed combat reports, but on a 16MHz (not very fast) 386 machine they flash up too fast to read. There seems to be no way to adjust this. Several times the program prompted me for retreat hexes, then it allowed me to take my move.

As I was still learning, it took me about an hour to carefully plan and execute my move. With historical hindsight I was planning a strategic withdrawal while concentrating forces at key road junctions. I was also careful to leave a few weak slow units as forward roadblocks. I planned my defensive artillery. I picked several juicy German stacks as targets for my bombers (no real sign of limited intelligence in action!) and was gratified to see the combat values of the targeted units reduce considerably. I knew that no such air strikes had taken place historically, so I thought I'd try something a little different. Despite its limitations, I enjoyed the game The programming and map graphics in **Blitzkrieg** are mostly first class. Sadly the boardgame which has been computerised is, by today's standards, inadequate in too many ways.

I shall not discuss here whether a computer is best used to recreate on the screen what could also be played on a paper map, as this was discussed in my review of **White Death**. If you like the idea of this game, or want to play a historical board wargame on computer, I would recommend **White Death** in preference to this product. SP

THE ANCIENT ART OF WAR AT SEA

Navy Black And Blue

by Ian Marsh

THE NAVAL version of Brøderbund's **The Ancient Art of War** is a challenging and complicated game to master and a worthy follow-up to the land-based game. Its appeal, however, is different: **The Ancient Art of War at Sea** is a true game for the strategist and the tactician: there are long-term plans to make and close-up battles to fight. In addition to conflict between ships, there is man-to-man combat between crews when boarding attempts are made, at which point the game switches to the battle level already familiar to players of **The Ancient Art of War**.

Easy Engagement

Naval actions from the 16th to the 18th century are covered by the game, which gives it a certain appeal to tabletop gamers who are frustrated by a lack of opponents, or at least opponents who are prepared to control the French or Spanish fleets.

Although **The Ancient Art of War at Sea** isn't as pretty as looking at an array of finely painted model ships, it makes the whole prospect of naval engagements a little easier, with the added advantage that games can be saved to disk in the event that time runs short. The game also allows the computer to deal with the tedious details of working out movement, turning, the effect of the wind and gun ranges – a valuable contribution to game play that allows the player to concentrate on his orders and, more importantly, firing those ship-shuddering broadsides into the enemy.

Cherubs Ahoy!

EGA just about makes the game playable, if a little plain; it's downright confusing in CGA. The strategic map with which the player is first presented is quite attractive, dotted as it is with ornamental sea monsters and cherubs that indicate the wind's direction. As well as displaying the positions of friendly and enemy ships, it shows the player's objectives: crowns and ports.

Crowns are the disappointing aspect of the game, allowing player and computer alike the chance to win by capturing the enemy's flag. It's like capturing a key objective, but ports provide this more naturally. But instead of being game-winning goals, ports are used simply to repair or to supply ships. They also provide some scope for piracy because they are supplied by merchant ships that the player can attack.

Moving ships on the campaign map is easy – a matter of using the cursor keys – which is just as well given the number of ships that the player sometimes has to command. It is possible, however, to join squadrons of ships, creating fleets with which to harass the enemy. It's important to strike a balance between manoeuvrability, firepower and numbers: too many ships make it difficult to control the squadron when battle starts; too few make a squadron vulnerable to the enemy's firepower.

When squadrons meet on the map, the player can choose to zoom in to control the action, which is always a good idea, otherwise there is no chance of an undergunned force beating a superior one.

Zooming in presents a bird's-eye view of the action that can be magnified even more to reveal the ships in a sort of 3-D perspective. This is the most exciting level of play because it's here that the player gets to order his crew about and fire the guns. Much of the time, however, will be devoted to manoeuvring for advantage so that a ship's guns can be brought to bear at minimal risk to the player's vessels.

There are techniques for dealing with the three main types of ship – frigates, ships of the line and flagships – depending on the nature of the opponent and the make-up of his crews.

Six computer opponents are provided, from the inept Thor Foote to Nelson, who is probably too tough for a first-time player to tackle. Each scenario comes with a default opponent, but it's possible to choose an easier or tougher one because of the flexibility that is built into the game.

Flexible Tool

The Ancient Art of War at Sea is a model for games that aim to give the player control over all the settings. By tinkering with elements of the game it's possible to make a scenario easy or virtually impossible.

Once a player has exhausted the possibilities of the provided scenarios, there is the game generator to explore. This option allows a player to create his own maps, build enemy and friendly fleets and even write the background to a particular scenario.

It is a flexible tool that certainly could find application in wargames campaigns where the result of a naval action could influence the fate of land-based forces. It's a pity the action is set in the period of cannon, musket and shot: action between galleys would have uses in fantasy campaigns.

The real battle in this game, however, is not against the computer opponent: the wind is the villain of the piece. Knowing how to use the wind to turn disadvantage into advantage is the basic requirement of successful naval tactics, but it takes time to master this element. It's possible to cheat and switch the wind so it does not affect the ships, but that hardly seems the point. SP

Designed by
Dave & Barry Murry

Published by
Brøderbund/Domark

Price £29.99

Available for the PC

CGA, EGA, Hercules

First published in 1987. This is the new EGA version

BATTLETECH 2

The Crescent Hawk's Revenge

by Bob Nicholls, Mechforce UK

THIS IS the sequel to **Battletech: The Crescent Hawk's Inception**. Once again the game features Jason Youngblood, looking for his father who has been captured by the forces of House Kurita.

This time the forces involved range from a lance size to a company size unit. Unit types include not only mechs but also aerospace fighters, dropships and ground units including tanks, APCs, infantry, hover vehicles.

The game play is far superior to the previous game, as there is no time wasting movement of Jason and his friends on foot. On the other hand one feature which is missing is the option to let the computer handle all fighting. This isn't necessarily a great loss.

One problem which may crop up is in mouse control. The game has trouble with mice of the multiple application type, such as the TEC mouse, which fails to control the cursor properly. I couldn't move the cursor using the mouse over all the screen.

Kells Teeth

The game starts with the information that Morgan Kell of the Kell Hounds knows the whereabouts of Jason's father. A lance of four mechs must be chosen from six, and these then leave on a dropship for the planet Lyons. Unfortunately the dropship is attacked by enemy fighters en route and crash lands into a lake. The mechs are trapped, and only a damaged Kell Hound, Jenner, can protect the unit from attack by a Kuritan Locust. Successful completion of this scenario allows two mechs to be retrieved from the dropship.

In scenario two and three the opponents are other Kuritan mechs. If any of the mechs from earlier scenarios escape they come back to attack again in scenario three, with all damage to mechs being carried over. Remember: this damage can come back to haunt you, just when you needed it the most.

Scenario four is against some tough ground units: Rommel tanks to be exact and if Jason's forces have taken a fair amount of damage you must be careful. Try to keep Jason fairly well protected throughout the game as if his mech is destroyed the game ends. Up to six games can be saved, and it is worth doing so after successfully completing each scenario.

The dropships become available only after year 3052 and are used to transport units around the Inner Sphere and to the training grounds on Arc Royal, where a further six scenarios are set. Mech damage sustained here is simulated and the aim is to learn how to control multiple units. Mechs can be selected for all the lances you command. It is also possible to replace killed mechwarriors with new ones from a selected few. These should be chosen with care to optimise your chances against the enemy forces that might be faced.

YOU WERE UNABLE TO HELP THE KELL HOUNDS DEFEND THEIR BASE AND HAVE LOST ALL CREDIBILITY AS A LEADER. KATRINA STEINER SUSPENDS YOUR COMMAND OF THE CRESCENT HAWKS.

Clan Legacy

The game builds up to the climactic battle against the new threat in the Inner Sphere: the Clans. This involves a battle to save the home world, and capitol city of House Kurita, Lutheran. Further material about this background, and clues on the Clans' tactics, can be obtained by reading the FASA BattleTech trilogy, especially *Blood Legacy*: the final battles of this game simulate some of the crucial battles fought in the book.

The game follows FASA's **Battletech** game very faithfully, with the 50-odd mechs and ground vehicles being taken from the game accurately. The game is fought in real time and explores the true area of command.

On the whole this is a far better game than the first. A knowledge of Battletech isn't required as the thick booklet enclosed informs you about the Houses of Inner Sphere, weapons, mechs and all the information required. SP

'Tech Tips

All the scenarios interrelate with each other. The mechs that escape in the first and second scenario comes back to haunt you in the third.

The Whitworth in the third scenario is worth trying to capture by making the pilot eject, salvage the mech for your own use in later scenarios.

This type of thing happens time and time again throughout the game.

Use different strategy to defeat your enemy in the various scenarios.

Use the different choice of game speed to your advantage.

Always try not to let Jason become to involved in the battles as his death ends the scenario. Unfortunately you will have to rely on biased radio reports to decide your strategy.

Use dropships to give additional firepower, intelligence and to control strafing runs and artillery bombardments.

Designed by
Westwood Associates

Published by
Infocom

Price £29.99

Available for PC only

EGA,VGA,MCGA (256-colour) and Tandy 16 colour

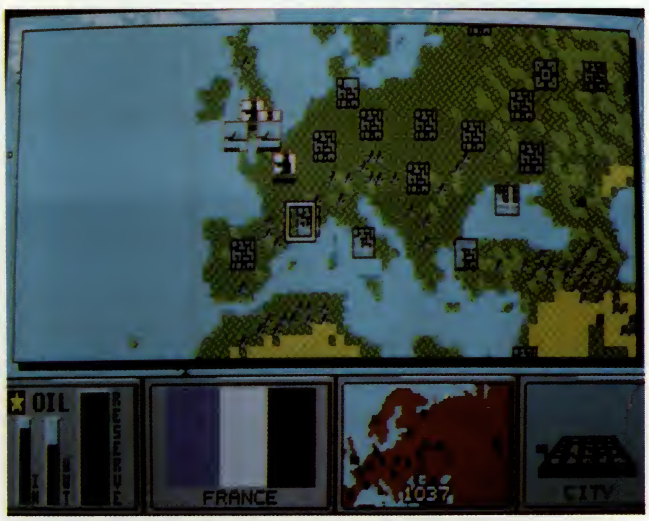
Hard drive, 640K and Dos 3.0 or higher required

Roland MT-32, LAPC-1, AdLib, Sound Blaster, PS/1 and Tandy sound supported

COMMAND HQ

Crisis In Real Time

by Brian Walker



Designed by Dan Bunten and Ozark Software

Published by Microprose

Price £34.99

Available for the PC

Hi-res EGA

Roland and AdLib boards supported

Two player modem option running at 1200 Baud

Planned upgrade to accommodate networked games run on LAN

Review copy kindly supplied by Software Circus

DAN BUNTEN, it may be recalled, is the designer of **M.U.L.E.** – a unique game and one that occupies permanent residency in most 'Halls of Fame'. **Command HQ**, his latest effort, is a real-time strategic level game of global conquest which offers five different scenarios: 1918, 1942, 1986 (hypothetical World War III), 2023 (future war), and ??? (far future war). In the 1986 scenario a customising option exists. After configuring the set-up, it can be saved and recalled as desired. The dates themselves are purely for reference. History plays no real part in the game. Time is regulated through the use of 'rounds'. The main effect of the rounds is to indicate the 'readiness' of cities when reinforcements are being placed, and also to determine revenue accrued.

The main difference between this and conventional wargames is its real-time nature. Things are happening constantly, everywhere at once. Just like the real thing. In this respect it shows up the inherent absurdity of turn based 'simulations'. Because of its busy nature, I would recommend players take advantage of the two tutorials provided. It should be noted that in the first of these, the area designated as 'Iran', has been changed to that of 'Iraq'. The units available in the game differ according to scenario. In World War I these are understandably basic, as indeed is the scenario itself: so much so that it should really be seen as an extension of the tutorials.

Desert Yield

A mouse provides the optimum interface; to move simply click on the unit and click again at the desired destination. Combat works in the same way: point and fire. Speed and attrition are determined by the type of unit and terrain respectively. In this respect the desert appears to be particulary unyielding. Mobile units can be 'tracked' simply by placing the cursor over them. Unit strength is reflected by a bar on the lower half of the unit icon. Assuming maximum fitness, all units of a type are considered to be equal. Additional strength can only be acquired by becoming 'entrenched'. Entrenchment occurs when a unit remains static and is not involved in combat. Units in need of repair may retreat to friendly cities, oil fields, and bases.

In addition to combat, economics figure largely in all scenarios. Revenue is generated by the number of cities owned ($50m per city, per round). Units may be purchased at any time provided you have the cash, though placement depends on the 'readiness' of the desired location. Although the manual does not say so, there is an upper limit of 100 units. So if you get a message saying: 'unable to purchase additional units', even though you have the cash, you now know why.

One of the best features of **Command HQ** is the way it simulates the 'fog of war'. Opponents only become visible only when 'spotted' by a mobile unit or recon flights. Diplomacy is present in the form of 'foreign aid'. This can be allocated to neutral countries in the hope of acquiring revenue-generating cities, and strategically important bases. Victory is attained through surrender in all scenarios bar one. The key to victory is economic: capture cities, thereby cutting off the revenue and starving your opponent's war chest. In the modern scenarios, control of the oil bases is vital. Stop the oil and the war machine virtually grinds to a halt.

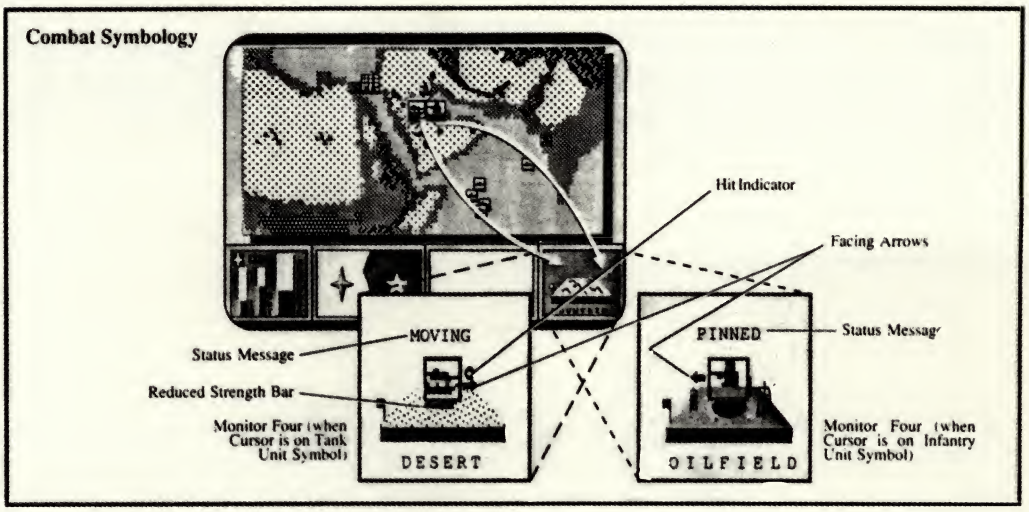
Roll Out The Barrels

So far this must seem like meat and drink to most wargamers. And indeed it is. What lifts **Command HQ** out of the rut is its real-time basis. It transforms a low complexity, bog standard wargame into one of constant decision making and shifting priorities. For example, an invasion of Blighty could be interrupted by a message advising that advising that the Americans have attacked the Axis forces in the Pacific, thus forcing the player to prioritise.

The early scenarios are a bit of a slugfest. The game really comes into its own with the introduction of oil as a crucial resource (1986 and on). In the modern scenarios, killer satellites and nukes also make an appearance. Satellites are, of course, excellent for recon. The use of the nukes is not encouraged, claims the manual: large numbers of neutral countries (and potential allies) will wave *sayonara* to any country that uses them, it says. The computer player *never* uses them.

Strike A Light

All the information pertinent to decision making is easily accessed via pull down menus and four monitors which dominate the lower half of the screen. The number of 'gor blimey' features to be found in **Command HQ** far exceeds those in any wargame currently available. Not all of them, however, could be described as essential. The facility to 'film' a war is quite neat – it is also possible to stop the



film and replay the game from that point, and, even switch sides. However, I would have preferred a little more detail about the units themselves. The strength bar is an inadequate guide as to the real state of the unit.

The manual is not up to the usual Microprose standards. The instructions for modem play are not in the technical supplement as stated, but in the READ.ME file. Also, the game is not key disk protected as the manual claims. Apart from these errors it does provide a comprehensive guide to play as well as some useful background notes. Graphics in the game are adequate rather than spectacular (units are depicted as icons). Anything more would have been a distraction in such a game as this. The sound is better left switched off.

Red Necks In Washington

In the 1986 scenario the computer player, taking the NATO side, played far too passively. Even though desperately short of oil, it put little effort into defending oil fields and none at all into recapture. As a result the NATO airforces were permanently grounded. The cyborg seemed quite content to build up forces in the UK and Japan and just sit there. Thus the pact was able to invade the US from both West coast and East without distraction. Apart from being stupid the beast is also stubborn: even after a red dawn broke over Washington the creature still refused to surrender. Eventually it saw the light after the 45th NATO aligned city had fallen.

In the 2023 scenario players start with no units, but with a pile of cash. Using this they must try to win friends and influence people. And, of course, build an armoury. The countries controlled initially in this scenario are randomised. The computer opted to buy friends. I opted to build an army. After three hours, guns triumphed over butter. Japan proved a bit troublesome so I dropped a bomb on it. The result calls into question the manual's claim that such a tactic does not pay dividends. Seven countries left my alliance temporarily (they return to the fold immediately you send a new unit in), but NATO lost four revenue generating cities and a whole wad of units *permanently*. Overall the computer player again played very poorly, and this was on the top level.

Radical Mode(m)

At first sight there appears to be less to the game than catches the eye, though part of the reason for this is that it contains more bells and whistles than an average *Mardi Gras*. **Command HQ** will probably not appeal to the hard core simulation freak. As a wargame it has no pretensions of realism. Even accepting its 'what if' philosophy, there are some absurdities that could easily have been avoided: subs getting sunk by coastal fire, aircraft carriers suddenly appearing unannounced in the middle of the Suez Canal, ships getting sunk while in dock. The latter is especially irritating: designating docks as 'safe havens' would have provided an extra strategic element to the game.

In solitaire mode, the game cannot be considered a recommended purchase. The computer opponent is simply too weak: it appears to be incapable of formulating a coherent strategy. It is possible to allow it to start with more money to provide 'balance', but this is a poor substitute for good play.

However, the presence of a modem-owning *homo sapiens*, combined with the all happening real-time design, completely transforms this product into a tremendously exciting and strategic wargame. A chat mode is provided so that players may whinge and gloat, while an upgrade is promised to allow the game to be run over LAN networks.

With **Command HQ**, Dan Bunten and his team at Ozark have gone some way towards showing what can be done to revive a genre in danger of stagnation. The real-time design is radical and makes you wonder why more wargame designers don't opt for abolishing the tyranny of the turn. What we have here is a supercharged chassis. All that is needed now is an engine to match. SP

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CHRIS CRAWFORD

Interviewed by Matthew Stibbe

Chris Crawford is the designer of Eastern Front, Balance of Power and Global Dilemma

This interview was given via electronic mail in the summer of 1990

CHRIS CRAWFORD is well known for the deep thought and attention to detail that goes into his game designs, and for his attachment to the Apple Macintosh as a development platform. He is equally attentive to the theories behind games development as he is to the details that go into his games. In this interview Chris discusses his motivations for designing computer strategy games, and the way in which he goes about it.

MS: How would you describe yourself?

CC: I call myself a computer game designer. I am not primarily a programmer, although I do all my own programming. I do not place much value on my programming skills, and I don't spend a lot of time honing them. I write fairly plain, pedestrian code in Pascal. Instead of pursuing a 'neat hack', I pursue a 'neat design concept'.

MS: For what contribution to the Macintosh community would you like to be remembered?

CC: My next game, whatever that will be. I wouldn't want to focus on the past. **Balance of Power** was a great success, and I'm very proud of it, but if I get too wrapped up in it, there's not much future, is there?

MS: What prompted you to begin designing computer games?

CC: I first got deeply into game playing in high school, playing the Avalon-Hill wargames. I continued to play during college. It was in graduate school that I really began to seriously consider some of the design ideas behind wargames, and after grad school I began to experiment with computer-based wargames. This was in the mid-1970s. Microcomputers were just then making their appearance. I bought myself a kit, some chips, a soldering iron, and I went to work. First I figured out how to build hardware. Then I figured out how to program it in machine code. Then at last I started working on computer games. Back in those days you had to be pretty determined to write computer games. And there was, of course, no market whatsoever. I did this for fun.

MS: Why did you make the switch from Atari computers to Apple?

CC: Necrophilia is not among my traits.

MS: What makes a good programmer?

CC: Conservatism. Bad programmers attempt too much; they seek the 'neat hack' that somehow does the job in a trickier way. Neat hacks are the bane of the industry. For every truly neat hack, there are a hundred botched neat hacks that create inscrutable bugs. A good programmer seeks to write the simplest, plainest code that does the job. A good programmer will often use less efficient but simpler methods if the time, RAM, or disk space thereby wasted is small. As a result, the code that a good programmer writes works the first time, has no hidden gotchas, and is easily modified later.

MS: Can good programming be taught?

CC: Yes, but the deep lessons of good programming must be learned by bitter experience. Every young programmer must go through the experience of struggling with an impossibly complex pile of spaghetti code to appreciate the need to write simple code. There is an interesting expression of this phenonemon in the usage of languages in the microcomputer industry. Two languages are particularly popular: C and Pascal. Now, C has established itself as the predominant language by a wide margin. The ostensible reason for this predominance is the expressive freedom that C allows the programmer. You can do anything you want with C, while Pascal imposes a great many fascist constraints on your coding. Thus, most programmers prefer C.

What strikes me as ironic, though, is the fact that experienced C programmers all develop a large and complex set of rules constraining their use of the language. I just finished reading a lengthy essay in the Apple developers' magazine presenting its list of do's and don'ts for using C. It is ironic that programmers flee to fascism of Pascal for the freedom of C, only to develop their own fascist self-constraints that could well be MORE complex and restrictive than Pascal's.

MS: Is programming an art or a science?

CC: Most programming that is done today is a form of scribery; it is neither art nor science. Someday we will have people who create programs whose emphasis lies on the ideas behind the program rather than the code inside the program. Then we can talk about art or science.

MS: Can it be 'managed'?

CC: Not easily, but it is possible, and often necessary.

MS: Who do you think the greatest contributors to the Macintosh community are?

CC: I'm going to dodge this one.

MS: Who will be in the future?

CC: Same dodge.

MS: Is the Macintosh still a fun machine? Should it be?

CC: Yes on both counts. Some people

think that fun is indicative of a lack of productivity. In truth, the Macintosh is fun primarily because it increases productivity so much. What is there that is intrinsically entertaining about the Mac? There are no funny pictures, no cute animations. The stuff you see and do on a Mac could never make fun watching for anybody else. Its appeal comes solely from the fact that it is so easy to get things done fast. And this is more true now than ever before.

MS: Would you like to see a 'low cost' Macintosh? If so, what should it be like?

CC: Yes, desperately! The IBM clones have all but wiped the Mac out of the home entertainment market. I am most critical of Apple on this count. In its pursuit of high margins, Apple has abandoned its software developers, which need a large installed base to be profitable. The primary feature of a low-cost Mac should be a small margin for Apple, something that Apple will make up in volume. For this strategy to work, Apple must ensure that its low-cost Mac doesn't cannibalise sales of the expensive Macs. This is not hard to do; a slotless machine is both cheaper to manufacture and cannot be expanded to threaten the high-end machines.

My version of a low-cost Mac would be nothing more than a Mac Plus with an internal hard drive for $1000. This is certainly achievable. I don't think that colour is necessary. A colour Mac would probably move the price up to $1500 – a tad too high.

(Since this interview took place Apple have released several new machines, one the Classic which is essentially a MacPlus with an internal disk drive for about £600, and the LC which has colour for about £1500. Chris was being truly prophetic here! – Ed)

MS: Does nationality or locality matter in software development?

CC: Not as much as it used to. There are still some advantages to living in Silicon Valley, but they are not as great as before. Good software can be made almost anywhere.

MS: As a games designer one is usually tied to a publisher. Is this satisfactory? Is there any alternative to this arrangement?

CC: It seldom is satisfactory. The brutal truth is that publishers use the profits from successful games to pay for the losses incurred from unsuccessful games. Ultimately, this money comes out of the pockets of the developers.

Thus, good designers are made to pay for the mistakes made by publishers. If publishing were more honestly entrepreneurial, this would not be so objectionable.

MS: How do you go about developing a game?

CC: I will spend a month or two just thinking about the game, trying to get my bearings. No coding takes place during this time. Then I will set to work coding up the most difficult chunk of the program, the part that I think will impose the greatest constraint. This is often a user-interface section. From there, it's mostly a matter of fleshing out, although there are two cautionary notes: first, the results of the first efforts often dictate the shape of the final effort; and second, the fleshing out is based on the long contemplations of the first few months. It may *look* like I'm hacking, but the relationships between the parts have all been thought through very carefully.

Once the code is done, I start tuning and polishing. I send it out to a group of people who do playtesting for me. One by one, they get the game, play with it, give me comments, and I adjust the game for their comments. This tuning phase lasts about three months. Then one more month of QA and the game is done.

MS: Is there a big enough games market on the Mac to support Mac-only games, or is it necessary to translate games to other formats to be profitable? Is this going to change? Should it?

CC: It is necessary to design for the IBM, although I still do my work on the Mac. The Mac is not a viable machine for games development. The situation is getting worse.

MS: How important is electronic communications to your business (BIX/CI$)? Could you manage without it?

CC: I could manage without it, but it is very useful. Several times a year I encounter technical problems that I just can't solve; I take these to the electronic networks and often get a solution in a matter of hours. I seldom need this help, but when I do need it, the networks are the fastest and best solution, and for that they are worth their price many times over. I also use the networks for gossip, maintaining contacts and other business/social activities. All in all, I spend about an hour each day on the networks.

MS: What would you do if you didn't work with computers? What would you like to do!

CC: I would probably teach and write – but I wouldn't make as much money that way. Lastly...

MS: How many programmers does it take to change a light bulb?

CC: That depends on the language used.

In C, it would take three programmers, and the light bulb would have to be removed and reinserted several times before they got it to work. Moreover, nobody would be able to change the light bulb after that.

In Ada, it would only take one programmer, but before s/he could begin work, 87 bureaucrats would have to write proposals justifying the expense of changing the light bulb.

Lisp would actually require no programmers, for once the programmer wrote the basic code, the bulb would change itself.

In FORTH, the bulb would change the programmers.

And in Pascal, we'd just buy a new lamp, as it would be too much trouble to change the bulb. SP

NEXT ISSUE

AI OKAY? WE RATE THE CYBORGS

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REVIEWS: BETRAYAL

GALLEONS OF GLORY

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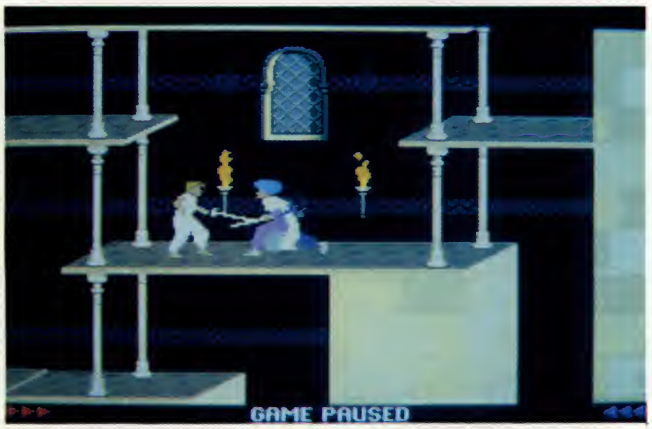
PRINCE OF PERSIA

Leap Before You Look

by Ian Marsh



Designed by
Jordan Mechner

Published by
Brøderbund/Domark

Price £29.99

Available for the PC, Amiga and ST
Reviewed on PC

VGA, EGA, CGA, Tandy, Hercules

Joystick or keyboard

PRINCE of Persia is absolutely heartstopping, a real-action adventure that grips the imagination and excites keyboard fingers into frenzied movement. It may be a platform and ladders adventure game, but it's a worthy one because it contains the elements of role-playing that role-playing computer games just don't include: traps, heroic leaps and nail-biting cut and thrust swordsmanship.

For a computer game, **Prince of Persia** has a decent and believable plot behind the arcade action. It's a classic tale of a beautiful princess who must marry a wicked vizier unless her beloved prince rescues her in time. The wily old vizier, of course, has slammed the young man in the darkest depths of his dungeon – designed by probably the maddest architect in the kingdom – and stripped him of his sword and possessions.

Race Against Time

Although not having a sword is disadvantage enough, it is easy enough to find one provided that the prince doesn't tackle any guards, otherwise the only one he'll see is the one impaling him through the chest. The key words here are rescue the princess in time: the prince has a time limit of one hour. This short time is a splendid way of putting pressure on a player and also provides a natural limit to the playing time, which is handy if you want to play for only a little while.

Getting about the dungeon and into the palace requires some solid determination. There are dangerous sections of floor and ceiling to look out for, some of which may reveal routes to magical potions. The scum that the vizier uses for guards in the dungeon are easy enough to beat, but fancy swordplay, including some complex advance, parry and thrust routines, is necessary against the vizier's best guards. Successful attacks both wound and knock back an opponent, so it is possible to force guards off ledges so they fall to their often spiky doom.

Death Of 1000 Spikes

Spikes and a guard's sword are just mildly unpleasant ways in which the prince can meet his maker. There are some particularly unpleasant chopping blades that make a shocking and sickening mess of the character should he misjudge his timing. But what really makes **Prince of Persia** a game for the stout of heart is the amount of heroic leaping that is involved and the desperate means by which the prince must cling to survival. Some gaps are just too big a leap for the prince to land feet first on the other side and it is here that he'll often have to cling on to ledges with his fingertips and haul himself up.

There is a great sense of achievement in making a series of running leaps across broad chasms from collapsible ledges, gripping onto a ledge and crawling up and under a descending portcullis before it closes.

It's easy to swear that these amazing feats cannot be done and they are, admittedly, a little difficult with only a keyboard because fingers too easily get knotted up, yet perseverance and boldness pay off. It is inevitable, however, that repeated attempts have to be made to succeed at particularly difficult sections of the adventure: this repetition can prove frustrating and boring, perhaps the only real fault of an otherwise excellent game.

Smart Moves

The animation is incredible, and although the backdrops can be a little plain, anything fussy would just be too distracting. After all, the prince has only an hour to save his princess so there is hardly time to admire the scenery. Short musical themes accompany certain events in the adventure indicating success or failure. And the rule book is blessedly short, clear and easy to understand with some very useful hints on game play. Even copy protection is built in as part of the game play, which is a nice touch.

Prince of Persia may be an arcade action adventure, but it's a damn good one that will provide a lot of thrills and make a welcome diversion from plodding computer role-playing games – they just cannot match **Prince of Persia** for excitement. It's different from other platform and ladder games because of the plot, which should give real role-players something to get involved in. You can almost imagine yourself as the Arabian equivalent of Wesley, from *The Princess Bride*, fighting to save your beloved. SP

ELVIRA

Mistress Of The Dark

by Ernesto Williams

EXAMINING the cover of **Elvira**, Accolade's Fantasy Adventure Game, reminded me of the remarkable similarity between 'the mistress of the dark' and Saddam Hussein. Yes that's right.

Just about every red blooded American male would like to get their hands on both of them – although I personally tend towards the nightmare scenario of a 'slow withdrawal'* followed by 'massive fall out'* and finally 'summit talks'* well into 1992.

As you have no doubt gathered, I will occasionally resort to the flagrant use of double entendre in an attempt to add interest to a game that does very little to justify even a vaguely serious review. To further enhance this ground-breaking critique, I have included an extensive cross indexed addendum on Elvira at the end of this review which includes just about everything you need to know about the legendary Hollywood talent.

Accolade appears to have strayed from its usual output of absorbing computer simulations. This becomes evident after reading the box blurb, which pitched the intelligence of the reader several hundred points below that of a *National Enquirer* journalist. It appeared to have been written by an ex-RONCO copywriter:

'...The look and feel of a graphic adventure, with the depth of an FRP... Caution: contains blood-curdling graphics ... so easy to play, it's scary!' and so on, *ad nauseam*.

The game did come in a reassuring weighty box, extremely well-endowed* with disks, rule books and bulging* instruction manuals.

But wait.

Before we examine the game, what of the lady herself? As the premier of adolescent male/wet dream/goth fantasy stereotypes, Elvira has cultivated a brand of tongue in throat humour so weak, cringingly obvious and lame that it took a feature length episode of *Are You Being Served* to reanimate my sense of humour after just reading the rule book.

So, then, Accolade was left with an interesting problem: how do you base a game on a 'character' with no personality and no sense of humour who isn't frightening? Its answer seems to have been to search through the dusty vaults of its rejected software submissions from 1985 and pull out an adventure bland and nondescript enough to live up to the stature of its host. A few hours hastily 'tacking' Elvira into a few locations and bingo! – an adventure game Hugh Hefner would be proud of, featuring plenty of gore and dismemberment to keep the horror crowd happy.

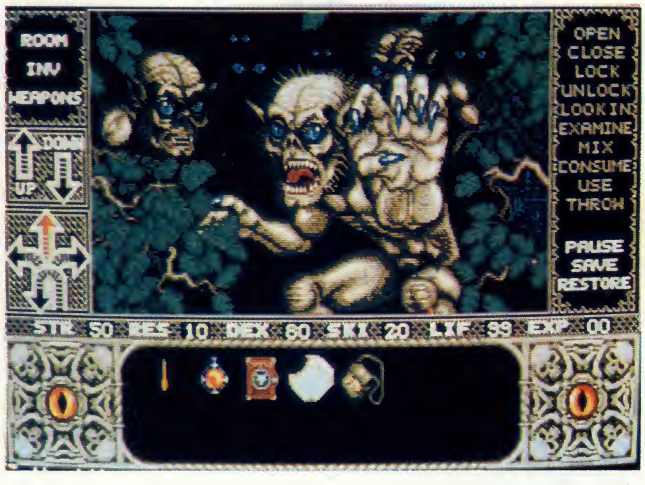
The plot involves Elvira's long dead relative Queen Emelda who, it turns out, has risen from the grave and opened a portal allowing the various nasties featured in the game to flood into Elvira's castle. To get rid of the nasties, six keys must be collected and... (sound familiar?)

After two hours of disk swapping to 'haunting background music' I began to display the classic symptoms of P.A.S. (Pointless Adventure Syndrome). This crippling illness enters the body through the eyes, eventually leaving the victim unable to distinguish between a narrative and a partly burned carpet tile. P.A.S. is thought to be a sinister viral offshoot from the more common P.Q.S. (Post Office Queue Syndrome).

Yes, the graphics are remarkable, and the game is easy to play. But...

Elvira is pointless, plotless, meandering, and tacky. *Twin Peaks* indeed... SP

Addendum:
* Elvira has large breasts.



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EGA, VGA

THE SAVAGE EMPIRE

Zoo Warriors

by Ian Marsh

Her! The woman you dreamt of! A fiery tribal she-warrior of some time-lost land... You and your friends rescued her from the giant pteranodon and befriended her.

ONCE past the stylish and undoubtedly pretty title sequence and its sweeping panoramic impression of the lost land of Eodon, there isn't a lot to **The Savage Empire** that makes it special. It fails as a role-playing game because there is no role-playing to do and because the computer cannot allow for player improvisation.

In a way **The Savage Empire** is just an adventure game with some role-playing statistics thrown in, which means it fails as an adventure game because there isn't enough to the game play to hold a player's interest.

Greedy Game

PC owners will probably be disappointed with the game, for which a 10MHz 286 machine is the preferred minimum configuration. That machine also needs to have 3-5Mb of space on its hard disk, expanded memory to enable it to handle the musical soundtrack and a soundboard to even hear the music anyway, otherwise the game plays in silence apart from the odd special effect. It almost goes without saying that VGA colour is necessary for the game to look pretty.

Compared with Paragon Software's **Space 1889**, however, **The Savage Empire** presents a far friendlier player interface. The screen is windowed: the main area shows the characters and their surroundings, the second area displays the details of the party and the third is the command window. There is also a line of icons for the basic commands, although even when using the game in mouse mode it is quicker to use the keyboard for these commands and the mouse to point at characters and objects. In the game's favour, objects are easily differentiated on the main display.

Short And Sweet

The rules are short, simple and quite rightly don't concentrate on the statistics of equipment and weapons. Information about Eodon – its people, shamanistic magic, creatures and the like – and a short story that relates how the character arrived there are provided in a small magazine that is essential reading.

The map, however, is the most vital aid: without it, travel throughout the land would be difficult. The different tribes, however, are a hodge-podge of Earth's ancient equivalents: in one valley there are the equivalents of Aztecs, Indo-Europeans, Asians, South Sea islanders, South and North American Indians, and neanderthal cavemen, all of which make this **Ultima** spinoff seem like an anthropological zoo.

After waking in a shaman's hut of the Kurak tribe, the player's character is ready to start adventuring. The main aim is to rescue the princess Aiela from her captors before she gets married off, admittedly unwillingly, to Darden the Huge – an Urali tribesman with the body of Arnie Schwarzenegger but a tenth his wit.

There are also your companions to find: Professor Rafkin and reporter Jimmy Malone arrived in the valley with you but have been separated. You have only one choice: trudge around Eodon talking to tribesmen to find out where your friends and the princess have been taken.

Origin obviously decided to dispense with complicated parsers for communication. The player's character, The Avatar, just needs to say one word to elicit information. It's brutally simple, effective, but offers no flexibility: there is no way, say, of arguing with or persuading a computer-controlled character. In help mode, subjects that a computer-controlled character is willing to talk more about are highlighted, making it quite easy to find out what the player wants once he has identified the right people to talk to.

Travelling about the valley is easy and is hazardous only because various creatures keep attacking the party. It pays to keep an eye on the orders window because it gives clues about the presence of enemies, making it possible to avoid them or at least to be ready for the jaguar or poisonous snake as it hurtles towards you. Weak members of the party need to be protected, and the default combat options that can be set for each character certainly make this easy.

What **The Savage Empire** lacks is a sense of pace. Travelling by foot is slow and largely tedious and quite likely to bring on jungle madness in the player, or at least a mild hatred of exotic potted plants. It is a shame, too, that supplies, weapons and the like are obtained simply by stealing them out of the huts of tribesmen, something that would be guaranteed to enrage the owners in a pen-and-paper role-playing game but which is taciturnly accepted in Eodon. There seems to be little scope for bargaining.

Smooth Switch

There are some nice touches: deciding who is carrying what and transferring items between party members is neatly executed with the help of the mouse, although it could go further. After transferring an object it still has to be stored to maximise carrying capacity. Combat is easy to execute, facilitated by the ease of readying a different weapon should one prove ineffective or run out of shots.

The Savage Empire obviously contains a lot to explore and to be discovered, but lacks the ability to create a sense of involvement and urgency. SP

Designed by
Richard Garriott, Aaron Allston & Stephenn Beeman

Published by
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New Maps of Erewhon

An occasional column on role-playing games and adventures

by Simon Corvinus

IF THERE'S one thing that distinguishes computer role-playing games (CRPGs) from other genres, it's the amount of time one spends nursing, training and protecting one's characters – making sure they get on in life, gather sufficient experience and loot and don't end up eaten by trolls.

With the more imaginative games, this involves a considerable emotional and intellectual investment which players are understandably reluctant to lose at the end of a game. Of course, a truly user-friendly game will allow one to wander around and explore even after the main quest has been accomplished, but this is rarely satisfying for long; what is really needed is a new and different world to explore. In other words, a sequel.

Sequels and ongoing series offer a unique opportunity to transfer a carefully cultivated character or group of characters from game to game in a theoretically infinite sequence – and by the same token, such transfers of what are essentially very small data files can provide the publisher with an ever-expanding pool of captive players. Under the circumstances, it's odd how little serious consideration most software designers have given this area. Sir-Tech's pioneering **Wizardry** series was the first to transfer characters from one scenario to the other, and by and large it did a very competent job of it.

IT IS NOW normal for subsequent games in a series to give players the choice between transferring earlier characters and creating new ones, but with a lordly disregard for boring old marketing considerations, **Wizardry** made no such provision; if you didn't have characters created in the first game, then you were locked out of the next two.

Up to 20 characters could be created in the first scenario, the splendidly named **Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord** (1981), and by the end of the game they had reached level 13 or so; this was just powerful enough to ensure survival after transfer to **Wizardry 2: Knight of Diamonds** (1982). By the time the second scenario was completed, characters were in the level 20 range and far too powerful for comfort, so **Wizardry 3: Legacy of Llylgamyn** (1983) knocked them back to first level again, with the new characters retaining some of their 'ancestral' characteristics, powers and honours – but strictly none of the hardware!

Wizardry 4: The Return of Werdna (1987) avoided the question entirely by putting the player in the role of the evil wizard Werdna, while **Wizardry 5: Heart of the Maelstrom** (1989) offered a choice between creating new characters and transferring old ones.

Incidentally, a minor but very elegant refinement to the **Wizardry** series consists of the 'honours' mentioned above: any character finishing the first scenario was awarded a chevron (>) after his name, victors in the second scenario also gathered a knighthood ('K'), and survivors of **Legacy** added a star to the collection.

One series whose entire plot revolved around character transfer was Datasoft's bizarre classic **Alternate Reality**. This wildly ambitious series of seven games centred on an exploration of The City of Xebec's Demise, starting with **The City** (1985), a rather plotless game intended to build up characters prior to sending them through **The Dungeon, The Arena, The Palace, Wilderness, Revelation** and **Destiny.**

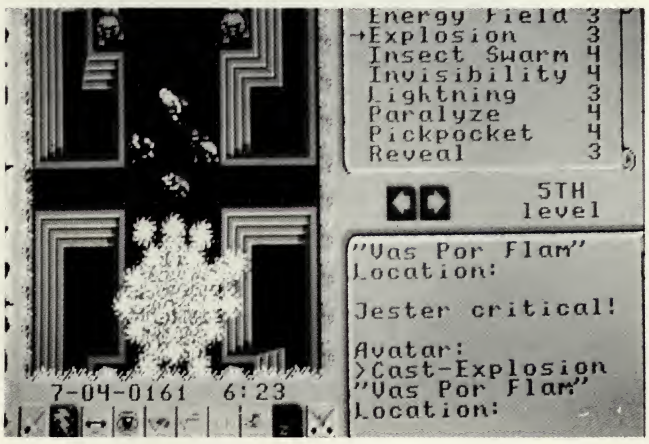
Of these, only **The Dungeon** (1987) has appeared to date, in 8-bit format at that; the transfer was well handled, requiring a **City** character to be saved while in front of a dungeon entrance in the first game before the second game was loaded. The character came across with full powers and attributes, as well as most of his equipment.

Sadly, the series seems to have ground to a halt, partly through some terrible design decisions in **Dungeon** (a ludicrous monster which appeared at random to siphon away your loot, for one thing), but the basic concept was intriguing and could well warrant resuscitation.

Origin's **Ultima**, on the other hand, never took transfers very seriously. While the Avatar can be moved from **Ultima 4** onwards, it hardly seems worth the effort, as the transfer invariably results in a loss of experience, levels and equipment to the point where there is no appreciable difference from a newly created character. Nor is there any kind of recognition of one's success in earlier games akin to the honours in **Wizardry**.

FEW CRPG characters are built up with as much sheer sweat, terror and hard work as those in **Dungeon Master** (1988), so it was appropriate that when the first sequel, **Chaos Strikes Back**, appeared a year later it should be described on the package as 'Expansion Set #1'. This is in fact

Ultima VI: explosive stuff



misleading, as the sequel can be played with newly created characters, but there's no doubt that a team properly matured in **DM** is far more likely to survive the mad scramble of the first few minutes in **Chaos**.

A DESIGN first, and one with a significant market effect, came with the appearance in 1985 of **The Bard's Tale** from Electronic Arts. Arriving as it did at a time when new **Wizardry** and **Ultima** games were overdue, the fact that **Bard's Tale** would accept characters from both these cult series went a long way towards establishing the newcomer. As it turned out, while it was possible to carry over very high level characters indeed and even find them equipped with a reasonable approximation of their previous kit, this did rather tend to defeat the purpose of the exercise; in the end, most players opted to start from scratch.

THE POINT, I suppose, is that when character transfer is little more than a mechanical exercise, it's hardly worth the trouble; the whole idea only becomes interesting when it's actually part of the overall game design, as in the ill-fated **Alternate Reality**. This necessarily involves the concept of ongoing character development taking place over a number of games, and in recent years it has been SSI's **Forgotten Realms** series that has come closest to that ideal, though – as we shall see – the execution has failed to take full advantage of its **AD&D** origins.

Characters generated in **Pool of Radiance** (1988) can be transferred to **Curse of the Azure Bonds** (1989) and **Secret of the Silver Blades** (1990) with levels, attributes and skills intact, but – and it's a big but – with none of their carefully accumulated booty and equipment.

This is particularly irritating as the hardware in this series is rather less lavishly awarded than usual, and the few good items discovered are worth hanging on to. More generally, player identification with **AD&D** characters is (by definition) greater than in other CRPGs, and the concept of a party of adventurers travelling about the Moonsea's shores can only benefit from a proper sense of continuity.

Sadly, SSI's designers seem to have missed an opportunity which was, literally, sitting under their collective nose in the **AD&D** rule book, notably in the section dealing with the construction of fortresses and strongholds. Here, then, courtesy of the Erewhon Cartographer, is a free suggestion to SSI or to any independent software house that cares to come up with a new program making use of **Forgotten Realms** character files.

Such a program, which might be roughly described as a 'housekeeping' or construction set, could take characters from any of the adventures, together with all their gold and assorted loot, and allow them to turn the profits into bricks and mortar through the construction of castles, dungeons, palaces and other sorcerous status symbols. **AD&D** rules already include detailed price lists for such things as arrow slits (3 GP), drawbridges (400 GP) and 30-foot high towers (1200 GP), and the actual construction could be by selection from a menu of shapes, with the appropriate withdrawal being made from the character's account. A Trophy Hall in the new dwelling could contain mementoes of past victories, and of course the constant need for further expensive improvements (library, oubliette, and so on) will keep characters on the campaign trail more often than not...

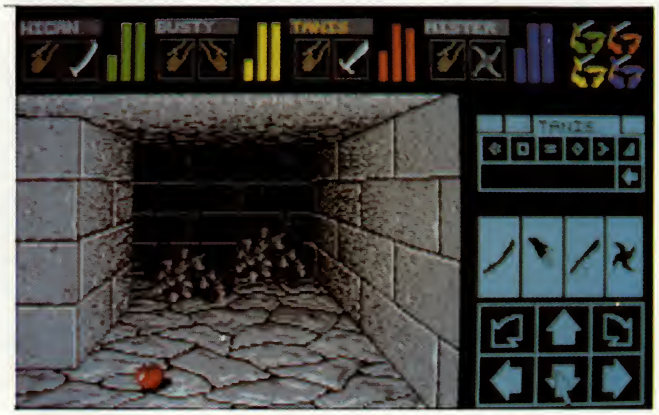
THE OTHER problem designers should keep in mind when planning long series of this kind is the one of over-fast promotion: a character who reaches level 15 and can cast 'nuclear explosion' spells by the end of the first game will be very difficult to handle next time around. **Forgotten Realms** makes an effort to slow things down, but by the end of the third scenario characters are already uncomfortably powerful.

The answer here is probably to allow for intermediate 'promotions' by way of detailed skill upgrades which are both more varied and less sweeping than level increases; spell acquisition could also, for example, depend on actually finding a spell rather than picking it up automatically.

Finally, it would be both relatively easy and extremely considerate of publishers to make sure that character files are portable between different types of computer, thus ensuring that several years of dedicated gaming aren't suddenly wasted through technological obsolescence. Origin has shown that this is perfectly feasible with **Omega** (1989), its cybernetic tank simulator program: all files used within the **Omega** system follow the same conventions, so that individual tank specification files created by players can be ported from one machine to another either by direct transfer, by modem or null-modem. Like Columbus's egg, it's simple once you've thought of it! SP

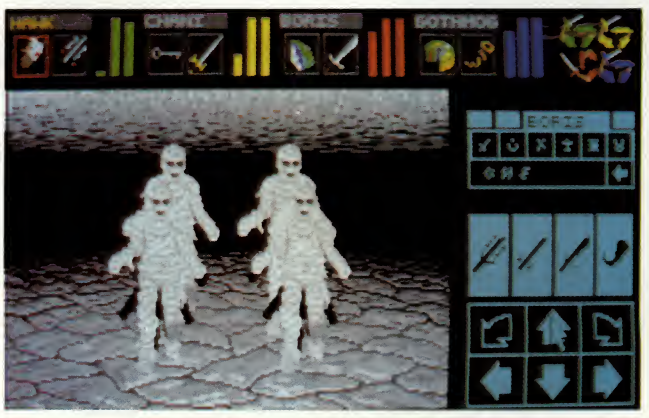
NAME
AC
HP
07:12 SEARCH
PILES OF EXCREMENT HAVE BEEN SHAPED INTO PYRAMIDS HERE. MANY OTYUGH ARE SMOOTHING THE SIDES AND MAKING ARTISTIC EMBELLISHMENTS. A GLINT OF METAL COMES FROM ONE PILE. WHAT DO YOU DO?
BARGAIN FLEE

Curse of the Azure Bonds: an embarrassment of riches



Dungeon Master: danger around the corner...

Mummy! Mummy! Chaos Strikes Back



SPIRIT OF EXCALIBUR

Of Malory And Mayhem

by Theo Clarke

Designed by
Alan Clark, Robert Clardy and Synergistic Software

Published by
Virgin Mastertronic

Available for all formats
Reviewed on PC

Price £34.99 (PC), £29.99 (ST & Amiga)

CGA, EGA, VGA and MCGA

Roland, Adlib, Covox and CMS soundboards supported

ARTHUR is dead. Constantine is his obvious successor, but the new King must get to Camelot to claim the crown. From York, Constantine marches south to Leicester, then on to Lincoln and St Albans before arriving at Camelot. If Constantine has successfully fought as a champion for the wounded Count Galahantine, and won the battle of Lincoln, he will find the Knights of the Round Table assembled to greet him when he reaches the centre of Arthur's kingdom.

Might Is Right

This is the first of the five stories that form **Spirit of Excalibur**. The player is presented with a mock medieval map of Arthurian Britain (everything south of York) and just five icons. Click on the crystal ball to display the status of any group or individual character. The scroll to saves or retrieves a saved game. The hourglass changes the game speed.

Click on the mounted knight and the little sword that is the usual mouse pointer becomes a red arrow. Click the red arrow on the shield indicating the location of any group of characters, select the characters that you wish to move and the arrow gains the word TO. Click the TO icon on any location and the selected group starts to make its way there. Click on the anachronistic magnifying glass and move it to any settlement to see the animated scene for that place.

Legendary Views

The animated scenes can have up to four icons: the crystal ball, a map icon that returns to the map view of Britain, a mailed fist that brings up the menu of actions available to a character and a door that takes the active party inside any significant building at that location. Once inside the building the party can move around by clicking on any doorways or stairs.

The second story starts as the first one ends. A hostile army is moving in from Scotland. Constantine must gather followers and troops to defeat the invaders before they take Camelot. This is not simply a matter of moving the King to castles held by good knights. The forces of one knight are too busy hunting a monster that raids the local roads. Another knight is unable to join in because his daughter is being held hostage. Lancelot is even harder to find, and all the time the raiders are marching south putting towns to the torch. Fortunately it is possible for the various loyal characters to act independently. Lavain can chase Cynewulf while Bellengerus slays the monster and Constantine seeks Lancelot.

Battle Honours

Initiating the chase is easy: click the TO icon on the pursuer and then on his quarry. Combat is also simple: the program can do it all automatically or the player can make rudimentary actions by pressing the mouse buttons.

Victory in combat enhances combat ability but there are other characteristics to consider. The king must maintain and develop his nobility, faith, armour and health if he is to be successful in subsequent stories. The king will also find that people are more helpful within his own kingdom than they are in adjoining territories. In the course of each story the kingdom increases in size and Constantine's sphere of influence grows.

Despite the elegantly simple player interface, the game is not easy. Finding Lancelot in the second story requires a complex sequence of visits and actions, and the individual combat with the magic giant in the third story will be a bloodbath if the player makes the wrong choices. It will take a very remarkable player to complete the game without recourse to some sort of hint, but the noble fellows at Virgin Mastertronic are working on a hint book to lighten the darkness.

Brooding Atmosphere

A large part of the game's appeal derives from its ingenious use of graphics. It must be admitted that the game is not really playable in CGA mode and is darkly ugly in EGA. However, the delicate colouring of the VGA and MCGA versions is entrancing.

The clever permutations of a limited set of sprites against a small portfolio of backgrounds yields a surprising variety of scenes in all the graphics modes. Knights are always represented by the same fully animated sprites of full plate mail, but each character carries a uniquely patterned shield in the VGA/MCGA versions.

Other recurrent images are an old woman, a peasant, a priest and a maiden. These are slotted into scenes with such varied accessories as animated squirrels, dogs, birds and tradesmen. It is quite a surprise to see a dog trotting along beside the king or

a squirrel scampering through the woods for the first time, but even more surprising that these tricks do not pall. The images retain their charm despite repeated viewing.

Look And Listen

These graphics were originally created on an Atari ST and ported to the IBM where the colours were enhanced to use the full set of 256 available under VGA. This seems ironic given that the UK release of this American product is awaiting the completion of the Amiga and Atari ST conversions.

The combination of varied and attractive graphics with a satisfying player interface would probably be enough to arouse the enthusiasm of most strategists, but the game also has a musical soundtrack that entertains without grating. There are melodic themes for most circumstances and restrained sound effects marking many events. These take full advantage of the facilities of the AdLib board and the Roland MT-32. There is no reason to suppose that the support for other sound modules is not of the same high quality.

The whole feel of this game is one of quality. It is fun to play; it is certainly challenging and there is a high level of satisfaction to be gained from it. Make a fatal mistake and the game will tell you Camelot is destroyed. The age of Arthur is ended. Now come the dark ages which shall last a thousand years. Persist and you will find that, like me, you are eagerly awaiting the autumn release of the sequel, **Vengeance of Excalibur**.

Package Delight

Included with the game is a beautiful large map of Arthurian Britain in a medieval style surrounded by a border of shields. This poster is used as part of the mechanism to ensure that only legitimate owners can play the game, though I could happily frame it.

The manual is also a source of pleasure. It is a fifty page booklet on a heavy stock, but the material is presented in a clear style with a crisp design sense. The first third of the manual is devoted to the game mechanics. The remainder covers the five stories, the historical background, and descriptions of the Arthurian heroes. It also contains a brief but well-considered bibliography. It is apparent that the game's researchers have done their jobs well. The designers have caught more than the spirit of Excalibur; they have caught the spirit of Arthurian Britain itself. SP

THE OMNICRON CONSPIRACY

I Was A Teenage Artichoke

by Maurice Thomas

WE DON'T go around gratuitously shooting people and then brag about it in seedy Space Ranger bars! Hell, no. We go around gratuitously shooting people and then agonise about it afterwards to our girlfriends.

Thus begins the encounter of Ford Prefect and co with the Space Police in *Hitch-hiker's Guide,* and it could equally presage a meeting with the hero of the **Omnicron Conspiracy**. Ace Powers, as he is rather hopefully called, is all you might expect of the tough, no-nonsense intergalactic fuzz. He has the low-slung stun-ray holster, the low hairline, and the laconic dialogue that are *de rigeur* in his line of work; he eats hamburgers, and his robot chum is called PAL. He also has a nice red star suit and a big crash visor, if anyone was in any doubt that he worked for the police.

Missing Agent

The brief of the game is simple. One of the police agents has gone missing while trying to infiltrate a drug ring and Ace Powers must flush out the culprits. He may even have to finish the drug investigation himself. The last clue as to the whereabouts of the missing agent comes from the planet Cron, so it is there that you must start the investigation.

Along the way Ace meets, interrogates and kills a wide variety of seedy characters: drug pushers, thugs, exotic dancers, bank managers and so on. As he is drawn further into the cesspool of the interplanetary drugs business the problems, the thugs and the drugs themselves get harder, until finally Ace gets to meet Mr Big, and presumably goes on to interrogate and kill him, though I will admit I haven't got that far.

Fun Graphics

Though the plot doesn't exactly throttle me with excitement, I found the graphics really fun. I am loath to tell you about the character who appears over the streets of Cron for no real reason (though Christopher Reeve played him in four films), but it made me laugh. Likewise the wonderful picture of a two-headed reptilian drunk lying in an alleyway swigging from one bottle with both heads. These things have only passing relevance to the game, but they brighten it immeasurably and force you to play on if only so that more such wonders can be revealed.

All the people you encounter look different, and there are no 'standard' room templates that I could find: thus the game never becomes visually boring. Obviously we are not talking **Hound of Shadow** artwork levels here, but it is clear that some time and effort has gone into its construction. Music and sound effects exist, though they are not by any means spectacular – just footstep clicks that let you know you are walking and the obligatory *Star Trek* 'swoosh' when a door opens. I suspect that this is because the game is a PC conversion, though it's still a shame given what the Amiga can do.

Ace himself can be moved around using either the joystick or the keyboard, and to examine an item, you have to position him next to the item and click on the mouse button. This brings up a menu of possible things Ace can do to the thing or, in the case of people, allows for the option of conversation. It is definitely not worth shooting first and asking questions later, as even the oddest people sometimes have something they can tell.

Other controls are few. Ace's 'pockets' are accessed by the use of function keys, and their contents are displayed to the side of the 'action' screen at all times. Thus you'll never lose track of Ace's antimatter grenades in this game.

The controls are desperately easy to master, and there is none of the 'hold down Shift Alt P while scratching your left ear to fire' business that puts me off many games. A lot of information is thrown at you, particularly in the way of star coordinates, so it is advisable to have a sheet of paper on hand while playing.

Omnicron Addiction

Despite what I have said about the plot – it isn't exactly new, after all – the game certainly has its addictive qualities. Though the character you move about isn't likeable he is, dare I say, user friendly and very easy to get to grips with in terms of control.

The one area where the ease of control lessens is near doors. Don't trust 'em. They're an ornery breed and if you walk too close to one when you're going down a street, chances are it'll grab you and you'll wind up in a shop you had no intention of entering. I was in and out of a service lift six times as a result of one of these little *tête à têtes*. Nevertheless, I shall carry on playing, and not stint in my efforts to get to meet and gratuitously shoot Mr Big, even if the doors do get on my wick. Recommended as a bit of fun. SP

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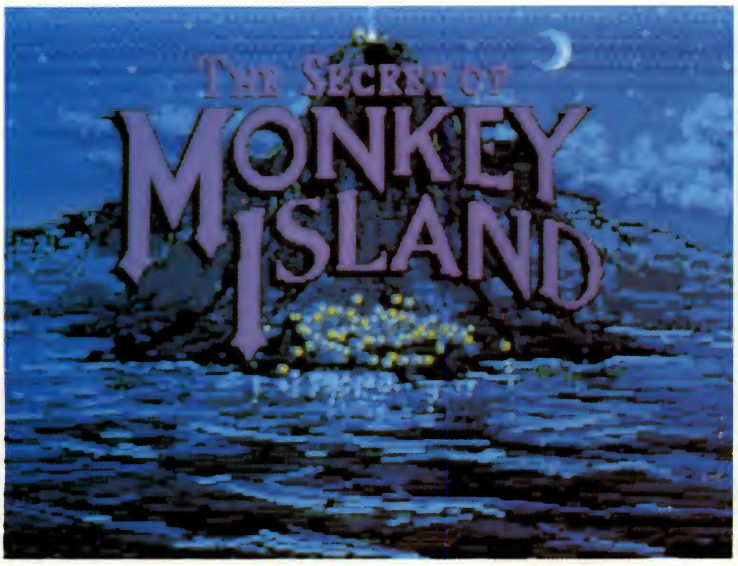


by
Professor Plum

Other hints

MIGHT & MAGIC II

It's not necessary to go into the dungeons under the castle to finish the game. There's no important info or items. It's only a side trip which requires lots of party juggling. Do enter the dungeons in other areas though.

If you don't find all of the cryptic messages don't worry too much as you don't need all of those either.

DEMON'S WINTER

A bit of advice when you're creating your party. Create a Paladin and buy him a priesthood, thus giving you two skills for the price of one and freeing a character slot. Don't bother learning Potion Lore or Hunting, they are of no real use in the game. View Land and Weapon Lore, however, are very useful. Having two wizards is a good idea: one with Spirit Runes, the other with Ice Prunes, sorry, Runes.

SPACE QUEST III

ESCAPE FROM THE JUNK SHIP: Take a trip through the eye of the mask – careful not to fall. Salvage the bits you need for new transport, but beware the harmless robot! Blast through the walls and you're on your way.

THE BURGER BAR: Make a complete pig of yourself, then go play the funky chicken game – it's not so tough.

HOW TO LOSE THE BOUNTY HUNTER: When he gives you 'one last chance', remember that what can kill you can kill him too, so lure him to the cave with the nasty teeth. Search through the bits the teeth won't eat, but remember to use your novelty to do it!

POLE VAULTING will get you over a hot spot.

LEATHER GODDESSES

Having trouble winning thr duel in space once and for all? Act the man (or gentlewoman) and y go wrong. SP

PART ONE

Pots make good helmets.

Do you know what a Red Herring is?

Pulleys are for sliding on things.

Meat with flowers spells sleep for fishy dogs.

That prisoner doesn't realize what he has in his possession.

Stuck underwater? Pick up something that isn't sharp.

Follow that shopkeeper.

On the paths you can meet insulting people.

Use your imagination for answers to insults (Collect some first).

Grog melts locks (and mugs, so take two).

If you can't get credit then steal it (Watch out for the combination).

PART TWO

You know how to get to Monkey Island, don't you? Try cooking.

Open cereal.

If you don't have it, improvise.

There is lots of chemical stuff in modern food.

What is the design on a pirate's flag?

Remember your circus act? Rope makes good fuse.

PART THREE

Push cannon.

Blasting can make a splash.

Use the spyglass to see where you're aiming. A banana tree makes a good target.

Two ropes get you a pair of oars.

Five bananas get the monkey to do something for you, if you show him how.

Impress the natives. Small idols make perfect gifts.

Once you're in the head you'll need another head. Ask the natives! Well? How DO you get AHEAD?

Pick up chicken.

Tickling is only effective if you stand on the RIGHT spot near his feet.

A key might be magnetic.

Tools are for opening things.

Once you got the root get out of there.

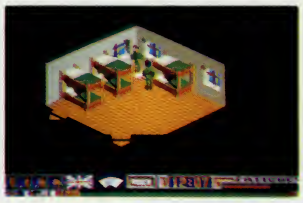
PART FOUR

You'll need to pick up the bottle (fast!). Then use it.

NEXT ISSUE

ROBERTA WILLIAMS INTERVIEWED PLUS REVIEW OF KING'S QUEST V

CLUED UP



Getting away from it all: prisoners of war in Escape from Colditz.

Escape from Colditz

Digital Magic

The **Escape from Colditz** board-game was fine except for the poor German player who had nothing to do for long periods.

Digital Magic's software version skates around this problem by placing the player in control of all four would-be escapees while giving the evil computer the task of playing the part of the Kamp Kommandant who tries to stop them.

Escape From Colditz takes place on a 3-D isometric scrolling display which includes an enormous exterior map and more than 600 internal locations.

Included with the game is the book *Colditz*, by Major Pat Reid, plus a map of the ground floor of Colditz Castle. Available on the Amiga, the ST version is to follow shortly. Price £29.99.

Lord of the Rings

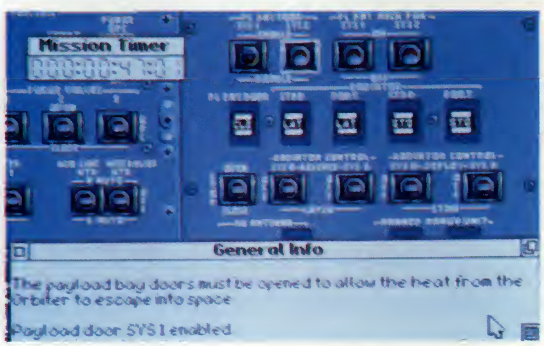
Interplay

Based on the classic Tolkien saga, **Lord of the Rings** is the first in a projected trilogy of games set in Middle-earth.

Lord of the Rings Vol I uses full-screen, top-down, 256-colour VGA graphics, digitised sound, a point-and-click icon interface, an off-line paragraph system, and four-directional scrolling to manoeuvre players through the huge, seven-map world of Middle-earth.

Within each map area players will be able to go on a series of mini-quests and adventures in which they can fully explore Middle-earth. Progression from one map area to the next is based on the completion of tasks that roughly parallel Tolkien's main story line.

Primarily a game of exploration and information gathering, combat will always remain a possibility because Middle-earth is inhabited by


Mission Timer
General Info
The payload bay doors must be opened to allow the heat from the Orbiter to escape into space
Payload door SYS 1 enabled

Hubble bubble, toil and trouble: telescoped missions in Space Shuttle.

Space Shuttle

Virgin Mastertronic

Space Shuttle is being programmed by Vektorgrafix for Virgin Mastertronic; it's a simulator that provides about a dozen missions for the player to choose from.

The simplest training mission is to land the shuttle after it has been been dropped from a jumbo jet. The second training mission is a take-off and landing; the next is a full orbit of the earth.

Subsequent missions include repairing the Hubble telescope and building a space station. There are also plans to provide 'classified missions' such as ones to shoot down spy satellites.

The attention to detail is remarkable. As the shuttle crosses the horizon the sky turns from night to day. Inside the cockpit there is an accurate software model of every aspect of the craft.

Switches can be flicked with the mouse and the player can swap between close-up views of the equipment, a view of the entire control panels or any one of a host of closed circuit TV images.

The closed circuit TVs are controlled from the cockpit but there is also an 'imaginary camera' that can be used to see the shuttle from a third party's point of view. The imaginary camera can zoom in and out over a huge range and it is fascinating to watch the vehicle orbiting a geographically correct Earth against an accurate backdrop of stars.

The shuttle comes equipped with sundry robot arms that are used to perform some of its extra-vehicular activities and there is a module to enable the pilot to leave the craft. Every aspect of the simulator is based upon NASA documents, photographs and real maps of the world. The game can be started at a variety of stages: inside the hangar, on the launch pad or even in space.

The complexity is breathtaking but there will be an extensive manual and the game looks set to be well worth the £44.99 that Virgin intends to charge when it launches the game in March.

orcs, wargs, dark riders and a whole cast of Tolkien monsters. Problem-solving is handled by a skill-based system that compares skill levels with the task at hand: lockpick, for example, is necessary to open locked chests.

Starting out as the character Frodo, players will be able to recruit characters to join their party, and as they progress through the game the opportunity to add members always exists. It's even possible to play the game by recruiting a party of members that include none of the actual Tolkien characters. The game takes players almost to the conclusion of book one, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The story will then take up with the subsequent release of Volume II, *The Two Towers*.

Lord of the Rings will be available next month on the PC, with the Amiga version to follow shortly afterwards.

Ring leader: tromp through Middle-earth in the first part of the Lord of the Rings trilogy.

Strategy gaming with a 'twist': Riders of Rohan.

Riders of Rohan

PSS/Mirrorsoft

This is the first part of a planned series of games based on the works of JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Described as a 'strategy wargame with a twist', **Riders of Rohan** promises detailed encounters between the main characters of the novel, plus 'exciting arcade sequences'. Available for the IBM PC, price £34.99.

Falcon Mark 2

Spectrum Holobyte/Mirrorsoft

'The only simulation that's better than this one is still classified,' trumpets the press release for **Falcon Mark 2** *(so you know it must be true – Ed)*.

The game puts the player in charge of a squadron. The missions available are all taken from today's newspaper headlines: Panama, Iraq, Ealing, or some other international hot spot.

The simulator is compatible with the Electronic Battlefield System devised by Spectrum Holobyte. This means you can link up with another player for joint missions with

Making headlines: missions in Falcon Mark 2.

Avenger A-10 Tank or another Mark 2. **Falcon Mark 2** is available for the IBM PC, price £34.99.

It'll all be over in 60 hours: Deuteros.

Deuteros

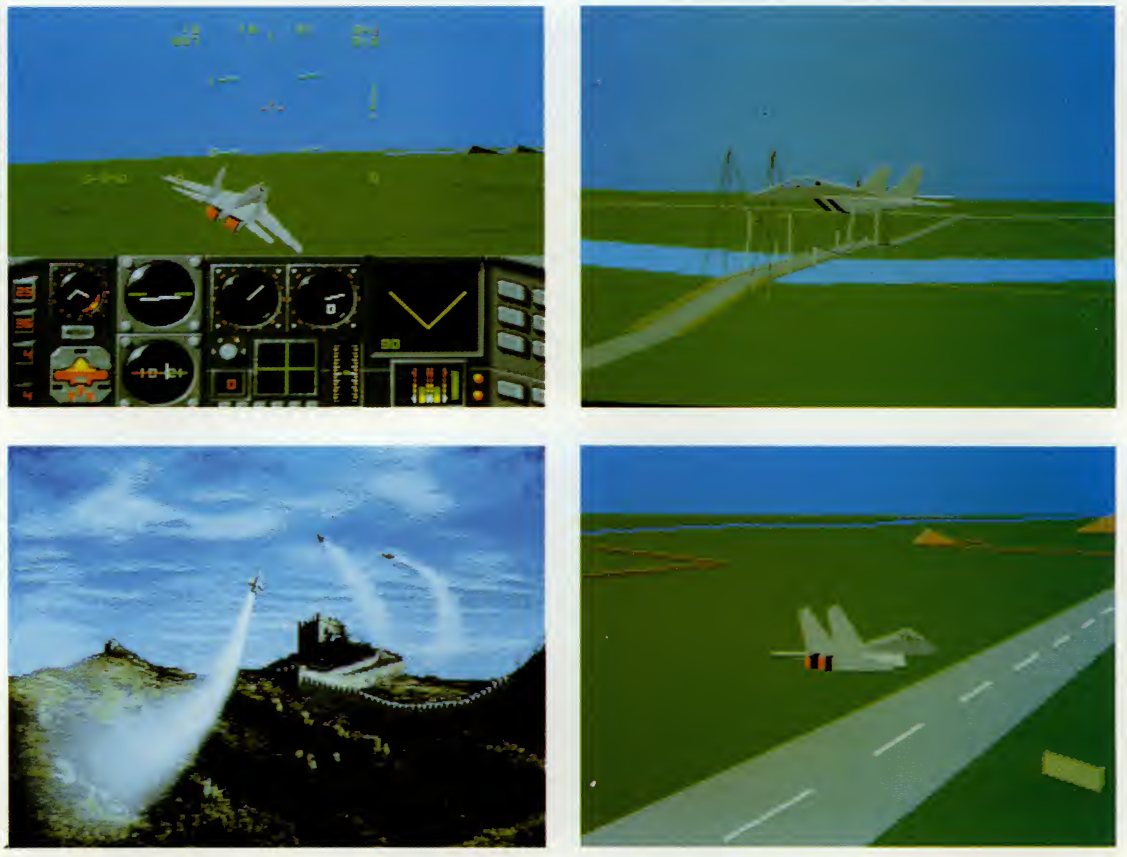
Activision

Taking up where **Millenium 2.2** left off, or rather 1000 years hence, is **Deuteros,** where the aim of the game is to colonise planets in the solar system.

Trade plays a part and so, inevitably, does war – victory is determined by the number and technology of the fleets.

Claiming '60 hours' of gameplay, **Deuteros** comes with 'eerie' graphics and 'fantastic sound effects'.

It will be available both on the ST and Amiga, and will be priced at £24.99.



Fighting fit: only the very best pilots get to fly the Mig-29.

MiG-29

Fulcrum

MiG-29 is the first ever flight simulator based on this aircraft – the Soviet Union's most advanced front line attack aircraft.

Acknowledged by NATO to be perhaps the finest air superiority fighter currently in service, MiG gives the player the opportunity to become one of the elite cadets chosen to train on this prestigious aircraft. The missions cover thousands of miles of Soviet airspace, from the chill of the Baltic to the Russian-Chinese borders, and on to the world's hot spots.

The missions themselves include photo recon, an air- to-ground missile attack on an oil pipeline, a bombing raid on the sea forces of Azaria, and the destruction of the Lehal complex to stop the construction of a nuclear reactor.

The MiG-29 is equipped with cannon and air-to-air and air-to-ground missiles. Electronic counter measures (ECMs) include jamming equipment against upgraded missiles such as SAMs. Available now on all formats.

Warlords

SSG

Warlords is a new game from those cobbers down under SSG. This, the company's latest release, is a monster eight-player fantasy and strategy game that is set in the Kingdom of Illuria. With the expiration of an unconvincing peace treaty, it's now a fight to the finish between eight exceedingly warlike empires. The first phase of the game is a breakneck struggle to conquer as many neutral castles as possible, and set up your war machine.

Tough nuts to crack: computer opponents in the eight-player fantasy game Warlords.

Pretty soon, however, it settles down to the serious strategic business of eliminating the seven other players to become supreme warlord. To do this, you must conquer all of the 80 castles in the game. **Warlords** has 16 different types of army, each rated for combat and movement.

Heroes play a big part in the game. They can explore the dark places, at great personal risk, to return with money, powerful battle artefacts or even alliances with demons or dragons. Or they could just be killed. The survivors make heroic leaders in battle, inspiring lesser troops to greater things.

The best part of **Warlords** is the artificial intelligence, often the worst point of strategic games. There are four levels of computer opponent. The highest level, the computer warlord(s), is considered by SSG to be its smartest creation yet. The computer will wage unrelenting, ruthless war against its main enemy with the singular aim of total victory. It will attack your forces where they are weakest and defend where you wish to attack. Flying columns raid deep into the rear of your territory.

Computer warlords will fight each other with equal ferocity, but are smart enough to agree on a battlefield truce to pull down someone who is getting too far ahead.

The PC version of **Warlords** requires 640K of memory and is for EGA or VGA only. A mouse is optional but recommended. The Amiga version requires 1Mb of memory. Full review next issue.

Deathly Krynn

Death Knights of Krynn, the sequel to **Champions of Krynn**, will be heading your way this March. Characters from the latter game can be transferred over with their money and credit cards.

Death Knights of Krynn features new monsters, new spells and an enhanced combat system. Available initially on the IBM PC with sonic support from AdLib and Soundblaster.

Impressions go strategy

Impressions, whose **The Final Conflict** was reviewed last issue, has announced that in future the company will be concentrating solely on strategy games, and has no plans to publish any more arcade games.

The move is in response to consumer reaction and sales of strategy games outstripping those of arcade games.

Imminent titles include **Feudal Lords**, a game of military conflict and resource management in medieval times, and **Merchant Colony**, a graphical trade and combat simulation set in the nineteenth century.

The Godfather: Al Pacino gets ready to shoot 'em up

US Gold muscles in on 'family business'

US Gold has acquired the rights to produce a series of games based on Francis Ford Coppola's trilogy of *Godfather* films, the latest of which, *Godfather III*, has just opened in the US.

To maximise the commercial potential of the licence, US Gold is to produce an interactive adventure game for adults and an arcade game for *Ace* readers. Release dates are to be announced shortly.

Conversions

Storm Across Europe, a strategic level wargame loosely based on Avalon Hill's **Hitler's War**, is accorded the rare honour of an ST conversion by publisher SSI. Full review of the Amiga version in issue 1. Available now at a price of £29.99 (the game, not the issue).

Making its debut in the world of 16 bit is SSI's **Typhoon of Steel**, a squad level construction set for the Amiga that focuses on tactical combat in the Pacific, Asian and European theatres of the Second World War. Historical battles or entire campaigns can be recreated using weapons and vehicles available at the time. 1 meg required, priced £29.99.

Imperium isn't the prettiest game you'll ever see, but it's certainly one of the deepest. Elections, drugs, economics and combat make it all sound a bit like Westminster, but in fact the game is set in space (review in issue 1, strategy article by the designer in issue 4). Now available for the PC, **Imperium** will cost £29.99.

Supremacy *is* one of the prettiest games you'll ever see, on the Amiga at least. There should be no reason why the IBM version should differ, especially in VGA. Supports AdLib and Roland. Price £29.99. Full review in issue 2.

Cinemaware's **It Came From the Desert**, one of our all-time favourite adventure games, is now available on the PC. Running off seven discs

in high-res EGA, **It** gives you the unmissable opportunity to 'see decent Americans being terrorised', as the box blurb puts it. Price £29.99. AdLib sound support.

Drakkhen is a tough and *jolie* adventure game from French company Infogrames. The PC version features full VGA graphics and AdLib sound support.

BLUE MAX – ACES OF THE GREAT WAR

vs

KNIGHTS OF THE SKY

by Brian Walker

FLIGHT sims seem to be employing a 'back to the future' philosophy. They *started* with jets and worked their way back. A further irony is that both these games employ high tech features in an effort to simulate the lowest of low tech aircraft.

The time is World War One; the place, a few hundred feet above the green fields and brown trenches of France. First of out of the hangar is the favourite: Microprose's **Knights of the Sky**. The packaging and artwork are as immaculate as you would expect. Included is a full colour operational map of the Flanders Front – an invaluable player aid as it turns out. Three-Sixty's **Blue Max** is not far behind, though: its solid box has some nice artwork. Full marks too for including both 5¼" *and* 3½" disks as standard. The lack of a summary card, however, threatens to puncture the gas tank.

The manual of **Knights** almost ensures 'ace' status straight off. It's another high quality Microprose production containing play details as well as historical and design notes. By comparison the **Max** manual lacks that touch of class. It is comprehensive, though the plane details are not as thorough as those served up by Microprose.

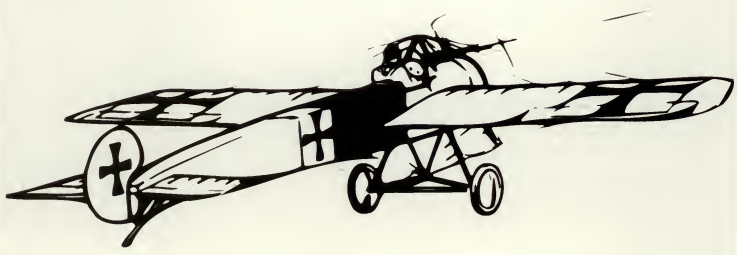
Flight The Bullet

Both games offer practice flights as you would expect, but when it comes to configuring the plane, **Max** springs a few surprises. It allows the choice of either 'direct flight' or 'realistic'. In the latter, each plane handles differently, thus preventing complacency while adding variety. The player is also offered the choice of 'crosshair' or 'bullets'. With the former, bullets go where you aim them, while in the latter they follow the historical route – all over the place.

Max offers a choice of several different game modes, the most radical being a two-player strategy game played on a hex grid that recalls the boardgame **Sopwith**. In this mode, players do *not* fly the planes directly; instead they manoeuvre the planes in a chess-like manner. The objective is to get into positions where it is possible to score a 'hit'.

All this takes place on a split screen. On one side there is the aforementioned hex grid on which moves are planned, while the other screen depicts a real time result of the moves. During this phase, players can fire at their opponent's plane. Like chess, it is possible to set time limits per move. A computer opponent is also provided for practice. Few flight sim fans are going to buy it solely for this, but it is a fine adjunct to the main game and one that I urge you to try.

Another surprise from **Max** also revolves around two players: the 'co-operative dogfight'. In this mode, players fly as a team (provided they choose the same side, of course). It is also possible to fight each other. A split screen is again provided in both instances, though it inevitably has more of a cramped feeling than when in strategy mode. Full marks to Three-Sixty here. Two-player alternatives are always welcome. For one thing it means the wife can join in if she gets tired of hearing biplanes whirring around the living room. **Knights** offers a two-player option,



KNIGHTS OF THE SKY

Designed by Jeffery L Briggs

Published by Microprose

Price £34.99

Available for the PC

CGA, EGA, VGA (256 colour)

AdLib and Roland MT 32 sonic support

Keyboard, mouse, joystick interchangeable interfaces

Two player modem option up to 9600 Baud (the faster the better)

but for modem owners only (see panel for details).

Bombed Out

Into the cockpits now. Both look as barren as one would expect. **Knights** offers a dashboard view, while **Max** plumps for a view of the wings as well. The **Max** dashboard looks to contain some modern instruments, no doubt in keeping with the design team's decision to emphasise game play over historical detail.

A short taxi down the runway and we're ready for take off. Hitting the 'O' key cranks the **Knights** engine: a wonderful chug chug chugging sound that is splendidly realistic (assuming possession of a soundboard). The **Max** engine sounds like a Skoda in need of a tune up. Surprisingly, **Max** makes up the deficit with an exceptionally realistic machine-gun sound: a resounding rat-a-tat-tat that dwarfs the damp squib effect that **Knights** offers.

As to the planes themselves, **Knights** offers a choice of twenty aircraft (both German and Allied) which appear in historical order. **Max** offers only eight planes (four German and four Allied) all of which can be selected at any time.

In terms of flight handling **Max** is by far the easiest, though this does not make it 'better'. **Knights** is very tough to fly in that it is hypersensitive to touch, as the manual makes clear. Obviously this can be mastered with practice. Also stressing the realism are the *longueurs* that occur in **Knights**. Accelerated time exists as an option, but it is fraught with danger. The enemy will appear to have planes that are equipped with turbo-charged propellers.

In **Max** the action tends to be more constant and a bit madcap, sometimes overly so: every time you fire the machine-gun it looks as though you've dropped a fifty megaton bomb! Apart from being exaggerated, this effect means it's hard to tell whether an enemy plane has been hit.

Knights has the drop when it comes to in-flight views. Aside from the usual every-which-way-and-up angles, the pilots can also observe their planes externally, almost as though they have angelic alter egos flying alongside with battery powered VCRs. **Max** offers standard views, while its VCR is available only during campaigns. **Max** offers a weather option, but as this fails to include sun it seems rather pointless.

When it comes to graphics, both games are a slight disappointment. This has more to do the limitations of current technology that any inherent failings. The polygon crowd will probably rave, but to this pilot the clouds in both games look more like icebergs. The digitised graphics in the front end (and back at base) of both games, however, are excellent.

Photo Fit

The heart of both **Max** and **Knights** are the missions. Success in these means not only medals but, more importantly, high scores. Both games offer a tremendous variety including bombing runs, photo recon, balloon bursting, and, of course, the usual dogfights.

In **Max** you can preselect the *type* of mission, while in **Knights** you get what you are given, though you do have right of refusal. **Knights**' missions also possess a strong guiding dynamic. The aces you are opposing come with a potted history which really brings them to life. In addition it is possible to select a particular ace and engage him in single combat.

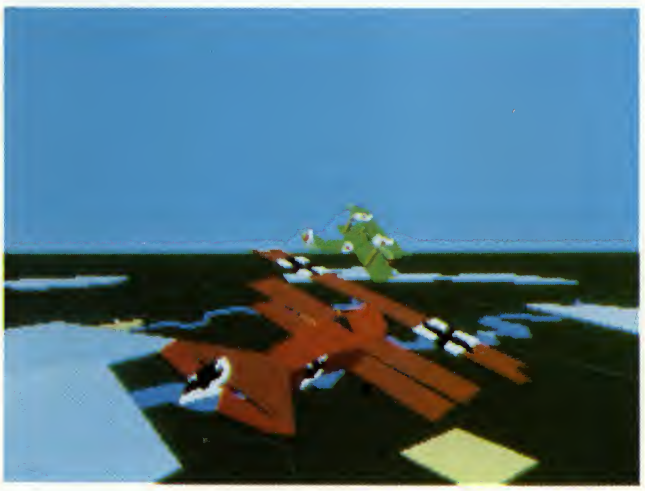
The **Max** missions also have a strong sense of unity in that they are part of a series of campaigns. The three campaigns included comprise: Bloody April, the Ludendorf Offensive and the Battle of Amiens. Unfortunately they are badly let down by the lack of a good map – geography plays a key role in the game. The diagrams that appear in the manual are wholly inadequate. **Knights** scores heavily here: both the paper map and the in-flight map are excellent navigational aids.

By now it should be clear that both games employ a different approach to their subject matter. As one would expect, Microprose opts for historical rigour. Three-Sixty is somewhat cavalier in this respect, but has its sights set on game play. The problem of the lack of maps notwithstanding, my own preference was for **Max**. This does not mean it is a 'better' game, in fact **Knights** has a stronger 'feel' for the subject.

The inclusion of the strategy game in **Max** is an excellent idea as were the other two-player options. **Knights** had no features which could be described as 'weak'. It does have a long learning curve, but to many players this is seen as a challenge.

Both of these games are high-quality products that can be safely recommended. In the battle between **Blue Max – Aces of the Great War** and **Knights of the Sky**, the real winner has to be the gamer. SP

Blue Max – Aces of the Great War



Knights of the Sky

NEXT ISSUE

THE YEAR'S NEW GAMES FROM THE COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT SHO IN LAS VEGAS

SIM CITY EXPANSION DISKS REVIEWED

BLUE MAX – ACES OF THE GREAT WAR

Designed by
Rick Banks and Paul Butler

Published by
Three-sixty

Price £34.99

CGA, EGA, VGA (256 colour)

AdLib and Game Blaster sonic support

Joystick, mouse, keyboard interfaces

1-2 players

DAS BOOT

Cruisers And Cobblers

by Brian Walker

KILL THE critics, Shakespeare said, but what did he know. Most reviewers are kind, decent, warm-hearted people, not the sort who would kick a game when it's down. And thus it was when I heard reports from the other side of the Atlantic that **Das Boot** was somewhat less than awe inspiring. All this badmouthing did was to make me *determined* to find something nice to write about the game.

Sure enough, this did not prove difficult: the packaging was nice, the manual looked presentable and the title sequence suggested Shakespeare might have a point. In fact all was going well until the opening screen. This depicted what looked like a giant sausage floating in a pool of blue ink. Maybe somebody had put the wrong disks in the box? But no, the titles clearly said **Das Boot**. The sausage, as it turned out, was a German U-boat. A pretty smart camouflage you've got to admit – I mean, who would think of launching a depth charge at a sausage?

From sausages to menus: the options *carte* in **Das Boot** is extensive, allowing the player to select one of three difficulty levels and choose from eight training scenarios. The main game, however, revolves around the missions, of which there are five. As in training and missions, high scores are recorded and saved for posterity.

Interior Design

The options for configuring the sub show that quite a bit of thought has gone into achieving a form of realism: 'historical' torpedoes (50% efficiency), obsolete equipment, all-knowing enemies, coded messages – added together they generate atmosphere.

The control room is neatly designed, as are the interiors generally. The missions themselves are well thought out and require some brainwork on the part of the commander, not the least being the setting of waypoints.

Much to admire, then, making it all the sadder that so much good work is let down by the dreadful graphics, which, at times, look far more appropriate to an arcade game. I must confess to not being a great fan of polygon graphics, especially when they are unshaded as they are here. Far from enhancing the game, on this occasion they diminish the 'feel' quite significantly. And believe me, this game needed help. It's almost as though one half of the design team wanted a simulation, while the other half wanted an action game. Shells that whiz through the air, a submarine that moves like a powerboat, deck guns that look as though they have been loaned from the Bismark, these are not the elements that make you feel the 'continual frustration and occasional triumph that a WWII U-boat commander experienced', as the manual would have it.

Licensed To Kill

What makes the game an even bigger disappointment is that it emanates from Three-Sixty – the home of **Harpoon**. What can the company be thinking of? After producing what must be considered a watershed in computer game design, we get this?

Despite its flaws, **Das Boot** shows that there is room for a game on this subject. The idea of specific missions rather than the campaign approach favoured by **Silent Service II** is a good one, especially in the context of the battles of North Atlantic. As Three-Sixty filched the film's title, following the cinematic narrative would not have been a bad idea either. As it stands, it seems a little bit cheeky. It's ronic that two of the greatest submarine films of all time, this and *The Hunt for Red October,* have inspired two very poor games. The Moral? Beware of games bearing licences.

To sum up, if you are looking for a combination of a simulation and action game with a vague film tie-in, then go straight down to your friendly neighbourhood software shop and say: 'Screw all those cruddy reviewers, Shakespeare was right. Give me **Das Boot** immediately.' If, on the other hand, you are looking for a game that offers the graphical detail appropriate to a game that describes itself as a 'German U-Boat Simulation', then you may take the view of this critic that **Das Boot** is a load of old cobblers. Or as the Bard would have put it: 'as you like it'. SP

Designed by
Paul Butler and Rick Banks

Published by
Three-sixty Pacific Inc

Price £34.99

Available for the PC

CGA, Hercules, EGA and VGA (256 colour)

AdLib and Game Blaster sonic support

WE LIKE...

Action Stations (PC, Amiga)

Silent Service II (PC)

Flight of the Intruder (All)

Links (PC)

Harpoon (PC, Amiga)

MiG-29™

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- **"Expert-driven" combat systems**
- **Unique missions featuring real world scenarios**

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John Farley, Test Pilot
(The first European to have flown a MiG-29 Fulcrum)

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MiG-29 photographs courtesy of John Lake/Osprey Publishing ©1990
Published by Domark Software Ltd., Ferry House, 51-57 Lacy Road, London SW15 1PR. Tel: (081)-780 2224.
Available on: Amiga, Atari ST, IBM PC 3.5" & 5.25". Amiga, Atari ST, IBM PC screenshots.

AIR CRAFT & SCENERY DESIGNER

For Flight Simulator 4

by Paul Rigby

Designed by
Bruce Artwick

Published by
Microsoft

Price £24.95

Available for PC

CGA, EGA, VGA,
MCGA & Tandy

Requires Flight
Simulator version 4

ONE OF the most advanced and popular flight simulations around is the one marketed by Microsoft – **Flight Simulator 4** (**FS4**). Rumours that Microsoft was busy on a new version of **Flight Simulator** recognised the hive of activity from the **FS** programmers but failed to identify the final product because, rather than jump into a **Flight Simulator 5**, Microsoft has decided to build on the advanced features in version 4 with the release of an **Aircraft and Scenery Designer**.

To use this program you will need **Flight Simulator 4** (**FS4**). Inside the pack you will find a single program disk (on both disk formats) plus a 76-page user-guide. All you do is install the program and, when you load **FS4**, you'll notice one or two additions to the menu structure.

So what's new then? For starters, you are presented with four new aircraft to fly around in. The Boeing 747-400 complete with its own control panel (for EGA monitors and up), the Beechcraft Starship (an advanced design business aircraft including pusher propellers and a canard), the Piper Cherokee Archer light aircraft plus a seaplane based on the Cessna 182. Next, you can design your own scenery using the static and dynamic scenery designer! At one fell swoop all of the scenery disks have become all but obsolete, for two main reasons. First, the designer is capable of far more advanced shapes than any of the results shown in the commercial scenery disks. Second, any scenery designed by one person can be swapped among his or her friends.

I'll bet that, in a relatively short space of time, we'll see the specialised public domain groups and bulletin boards awash with scenery for all over the world as well as a wodge of very detailed selected areas (home towns, nearby airports, and so on).

New Places

In the static scenery designer you can customise your flying environment. Choose from a variety of ready-made objects and decide what shape they will form and what colour they will be. There are a wealth of different tools to help you do the job. There are a variety of viewing modes (pan around an object, raise and lower viewpoints and so on), movement keys (use the keys or mouse to move around the object) and you can place an object anywhere in the simulation world (right down to the minutes of each longitude and latitude).

Some objects such as roads, rivers and buildings are provided, but you can customise them before or after you place them on the landscape. Other items such as polygons, mountains and lines, approach lights on runways, runway colours, navigational aids (such as NDB beacons) and flight time gates for custom race courses can be added.

The dynamic scenery designer deals with the animated objects such as other aircraft, cars, yachts and so on. You can tell each object where to go, when to move, where to move to, what happens when the recorded action ends and so on.

New Planes

Finally, the aircraft designer section in **Flight Simulator 4** has been enhanced with many more options to change an aircraft's design. So you can change the gyro dihedral, altitude derate, lift co-efficient, yaw damper, fuel capacity, introduce an overspeed warning, include thrust reversers, alter the crash resistance and more! You can even place the serial number on the side of the aircraft!

Altering the specifications for your new aircraft is very simple. To give you an example let us consider the stall warning in an aircraft. Most aircraft have them (indicators or audio horns). They work by sensing the main wing angle of attack, setting off the warning when it reaches a predetermined angle.

If you follow the Federal Aviation Administration rules – the civil aviation authority in the USA – a warning should occur at least five degrees prior to stalling. So you would want to set the stall-warning value to the number of degrees (say 45 degrees) that will set off a warning just prior to stalling (say 50 degrees). You would need to test-fly your design to find out the exact figure. Once you've found it, enter the designer option from the menu, choose option C (the Wgt/Bal/Instrum/Struct menu), type in the degrees necessary to set off the alarm, press ENTER and you've done it. Simple!

The **Aircraft and Scenery Designer** is an incredible add-on that will keep all flight sim aficionados quiet for years! What better way to generate detailed scenery disks than to encourage the enthusiastic users to do it themselves. Finally, you can include a detailed model of your own home town or nearby airport and generate dynamic scenery (aircraft, cars and the like) to bring it to life. The aircraft designer takes your breath away with the depth of detail available and the extra flight models roll up as an exciting bonus. The Bruce Artwick Corporation, which produced this add-on for **FS4**, is to be congratulated for the depth of detail and sense of professionalism that this product exudes. SP

WINKS AND NUDGES

Hints for Microprose's F-19 Stealth Fighter

by Paul Rigby

F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER is a cracking game, but not the easiest simulation to play, so a few hints and tips wouldn't go amiss, I'm sure.

First and foremost, remember, at all times, that your aircraft is a stealth aircraft – not a twin-engined F-15 with afterburner. Remember that you will not be able to power your way out of trouble.

Use your aircraft's best features. Fly as low as possible to maintain a low radar profile – 100 to 150 feet is best but you will need to concentrate at this altitude as things get a little bumpy with turbulence threatening to knock your aircraft into the ground. Extending your flaps can help to smooth the ride, though, as can engaging the autopilot. If this altitude becomes too hot then 500 feet should be your highest normal altitude during flight to the target.

Plane's Not For Turning

Avoid steep turns as they increase your radar profile and threaten the onset of stall. If you find yourself near to an enemy patrol try cutting the throttle to around 30-40%. At this speed you will be difficult to see by radar. Do not, whatever you do, make any violent turns at this speed or stall will set in.

Use the advice given to you in the manual about flying towards or away from pulse radars and around doppler radars. In addition, you might try to alter your course dramatically between pulses to confuse them further.

Sometimes, though, you will find yourself slap bang in a few radars of different types. One type of evasive action will work for one radar but also means that you'll be spotted by a second or third radar. In these cases take advantage of the natural terrain. Fly behind mountains and through canyons. Even if they take you away from the target you'll save fuel in the long run. After all, you'll burn up gallons of fuel dodging SAMs all day and night.

During ground attacks one method of attack is ignored by many players – the 20mm gun strafe. Invaluable, especially if you see a prime target (such as a depot, oil tank or SAM site) but you've used all of your air-to-ground weapons on other targets.

The art of successfully destroying a ground target with the cannon requires practice but following this procedure should help. Line up the target. Once you have committed yourself it's difficult to re-align so start early. Approach the target at a low altitude. At around 6km pull up hard and level out at about 1000 feet. Then, at about 3km, where the gun is most effective, extend the speed brake and begin your dive. Place the aiming reticle either on the target or just ahead of it. Fire a short burst, see where it hits and adjust if your aim is incorrect. Then blast the thing to kingdom come! WARNING: don't become hypnotised and fly right into the ground!

The F-19 was not designed for air-to-air superiority so you would be wise to avoid enemy aircraft if at all possible. However, if you feel that air combat is impossible switch, if range permits, to the trusty AMRAAM or Sidewinder (at shorter range).

Seeing Red

If you encounter an air target that is approaching head-on you should not wait for the aiming reticle to turn to oval and red in colour (the normal 'high effect' range for either missile). Because of the approaching speeds of the your aircraft and your opponent any fired missile would quickly lose flight time and will, probably, speed right past the target. In this case give the missile plenty of time to manoeuvre and hit the target by firing it close to maximum range.

Mission Improbable

It is the missions in **F-19** that make this simulation so unique. What other flight simulation orders you to fly Cold War missions on reconnaissance and then removes points from your final tally if you have been spotted during your flight?

Cold war missions are probably the best missions to fly if you wish to accrue points as you will increase your points total the longer you spend in enemy territory.

Couple Cold War missions with areas such as Europe and North Cape and you may, with the other difficulty levels set on 'high', achieve the ultimate accolade, the Congressional Medal of Honour. In addition, you will need to fly high point missions to keep a high total average which will give you a good chance to attain Brigadier General after the maximum 99 missions. Good Luck! SP

Microprose's F-19 Stealth Fighter was designed by Jim Synowski and Arnold Hendrick

The game is out and about on PC (£39.99), Amiga (£29.99) and ST (£29.99)

EURORAILS

The European Railbuilding Game

by Brian Walker

NOW THAT the '18' series of railroad games has another addition to the clan (**1835**), it seems only right that an equally famous line should follow suit. **Eurorails** succeeds **Empire Builder** and **British Rails**, using the same system and throwing in a some new ideas for good measure.

The most immediately noticeable change is that of the production quality: this latest offering arrives in a smart-looking rigid flatpack rather than opting for the crushed corn flakes packets of old. The mapboard is now a solid-looking three-fold, as opposed to a jig cut, and a tray is provided for all the delivery chips.

We're Getting There

The cards too are of a high quality, making a welcome change from the crud that accompanies most American games. The rules are presented in a smart booklet and are clear for the most part. The only omission appears to be the rule that governs starting positions: the implication is that you can start anywhere.

The aim of the game is to build a railway network to facilitate collection and delivery of various products. This is how revenue is acquired. As the title suggests, Europe is the theatre of operations. Each player starts off with ECU 50m and three demand cards. A turn is divided into two phases: operating your train and building. Movement is regulated by a series of dots ('mileposts'). Trains may move up to 12 mileposts per turn depending on the type of train you have. En route they may pick up and deliver loads according to the demand cards they hold.

Delivering The Goods

Whenever a load is successfully delivered, payment is made and a new demand card drawn. Occasionally an event card will be drawn. Mostly these affect all players, thereby decreasing the luck element normally associated with such cards. They may be even be dispensed with altogether if the players agree to. In the building round, players may spend up to ECU 20m on expanding their network.

The building itself consists of drawing on the mapboard using the erasable crayons provided. Cost is calculated from milepost to milepost and varies according to terrain.

An alternative to building is to upgrade your train, also for a cost of ECU 20m. The winner is the first player to amass ECU 250m and connect seven major cities.

Despite it contravening the primary criterion for a good game – the law of player interaction, **Eurorails** makes for a fascinating game. It can, however, be quite headache inducing. Planning a network and scheduling deliveries not only require considerable skill and logic, but also serious concentration.

Ferry Crossing

Luck comes in the demand cards that you draw, but even the best dip will be no help unless you have a halfway decent network. The main difference between **Eurorails** and its predecessors, apart from the improved production quality, is the addition of ferry ports and a host of optional rules. Of these I would recommend using the 'mercy', 'equal turns' and 'open contract' rules as standard.

The game can handle up to six players, though this would be stretching it a bit. Not only does the map get cramped, but your turn can be a long time a coming. Four should be considered the optimum number while three works quite well also.

Full marks to Mayfair for not only getting the geography right and using local spellings, but also for the being the first games company, to the best of my knowledge, to use the ECU. If the Americans can do it, how come we seem to be having so much trouble? SP

Designed by
Darwin Bromley

Published by
Mayfair Games

Price £25.99

2-6 players

WE LIKE...

Airlines

1835

Organised Crime

Battle of Britain

Space Crusade

AIRLINES

Share In The Air

by Mark Green

AIRLINES is the latest game from the prolific design board of Alan R Moon. The concept of a business game, with neat but simple mechanics, reminds me of **Acquire**. In one other respect it resembles **Acquire**: it is a very good game.

The board is a map of North America with airline routes marked across it that link up the major cities. Nine cities are the home bases of the nine airline companies that will slowly establish their flight networks built out from home. The game is played with two decks of cards: share cards and flight cards. Share cards are declared in front of a player to show a stake in a company, and flight cards are used to extend flight networks.

Fly The Flag

The aim of the game is to score the highest points total, which will come from having declared shareholdings in the biggest companies at four scoring phases. This is the first gem in **Airlines** – the first three of the point scoring phases are determined by cards shuffled into the share deck. This means that you are constantly having to balance the advantage of declaring shares (in case points are scored soon) against the benefits of building up your position in terms of cards in hand and networks built.

All good games present the player with a tough choice of decisions, and **Airlines** follows this concept closely. Each turn a player has a choice of three actions: found an airline, expand a flight network or declare share cards in one airline. Founding an airline occurs when the first shares are declared, so by definition this occurs only nine times in a game. You should always found an airline whenever you can.

The real choice is picking one of the other two actions: expanding a network increases the value of one airline and allows you to pick up another share card. As this is the only way to obtain more cards, this tends to be the default move. Declared shares, however, are the only way to score points so getting shares declared on the table is crucial. The down side is that this takes cards from your hand and is the only action allowed on that turn.

The first time you play **Airlines** you will be terribly frustrated. You always have a choice of half a dozen actions which all seem vital, and you get to perform only one per turn. You will be busy building up flight networks and the score cards will come up at just the wrong moment. Or you will declare small shareholdings in some airlines and then see two larger shareholdings come out in both to push you out (only the top two shareholders score points). The end of the game will see one smug idiot and five others thirsting for a rematch.

Take More Care

The game is well presented, a clear uncluttered board which is easy to follow. It would have been nicer if the cities had been named and more accurately positioned, but this is a minor quibble. The network markers are coloured wooden discs, standard good quality German components – although pink and red are a little hard to distinguish. The cards are very smart, and as they are the most constantly handled components it is good to see that Abacus has gone for good quality.

Airlines has enough 'weight' to satisfy most gamers, and at 90 minutes' playing time should become popular with just about everyone. SP

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Designed by
Alan R Moon

Published by
Abacusspiele

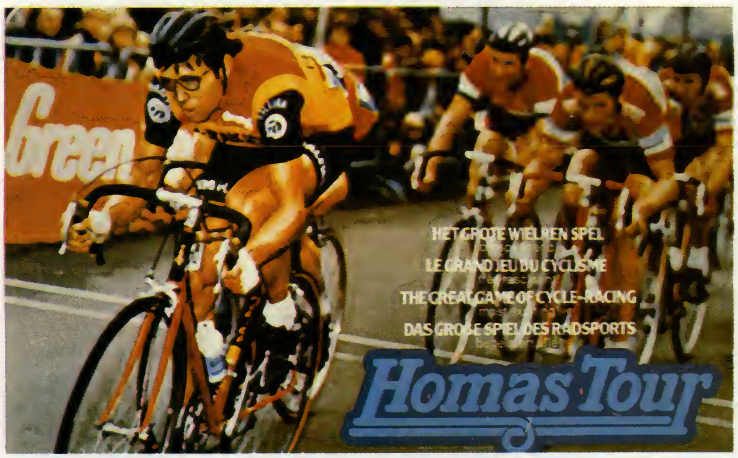
Price £20

2–6 players

Playing time 1½ hours

TOUR DE CHANCE

George Crawshay lucks out on Homas Tour (RIP)



AS LUCK would have it, during a brief business trip to Amsterdam some five years ago I discovered the best toy shop only on my last day there. Much of the contents of the games department was run of the mill, but in a corner was this pile of large, colourful boxes depicting a bunch of racing cyclists. Even better, the blurb was in four languages, one of which was English.

Having glanced at the price and blanched appropriately, I looked inside the sample box. The first discovery was that the polyglot approach extended only to the lid. I was confronted by 16 pages of Dutch, (or eight of double Dutch, to put it another way). As I had an appointment coming up I was clearly not going to make any sense out of it at all then and there, so reluctantly I replaced the lid and went on my way.

Look And Feel

Back in the UK, however, I could not get it out of my mind. The game board looked so interesting, and the rules, Dutch though they might be, had been studded with interesting diagrams and charts. Dammit, it had the look, the *feel* of a game over which someone had taken a great deal of trouble. Surely all that work couldn't be a complete waste. So a few days later out went a telephone call to our office manager and a plea to the obliging secretary there: could someone take a short walk to the toy shop, and could the secretary possibly handle a small translation job? OK, I grant you a little bit of truth economy there, but she might not have agreed if I'm said 16 pages, and (as she had refused to take any payment) I did buy her the most enormous box of chocolates!

Had all this hassle and investment resulted in a bust I think I might have cried. As it turned out it was worth twice the fuss. For me **Homas Tour** is one of the great race games, obviously designed with great love and care and well worthy of its place in my desert island package.

For those unfamiliar with it, the game is played on a huge board depicting a race track on the flat around the perimeter, out of which two complicated hill climbs twist and turn in the interior. The sections can be combined in various ways to produce different itineraries. Four players take part, each representing a country with a team of four cyclists.

Wait For The Slipstream

Movement is basically by the throw of two dice for each bicycle, starting with the one in the lead and proceeding back down the line as in **Speed Circuit**; when cycles are level with each other preference goes from the outside in (right to left, the race being anti-clockwise). However, there are several modifying factors, one of the most interesting being the 'following' rule: when a machine is immediately behind another, its owner can usually decide whether to await its turn and throw dice or instantly take the same throw as the one in front, provided that it is able to end up in the same relative position, ie still immediately behind its leader (there are places on the board where this is tricky, for example because of intervening walls on corners). If the rider does decide to follow and has another one behind *him*, that rider also has the choice of following, and so on. Sometimes you will see a cavalcade of five or six riders snaking their way along the track.

Another modifying factor is the use of strength cards. These just contain a number, either five or six, on a white or blue background, and each team is allocated 14 cards, 10 of which are specific to numbered riders while four are jokers. Each cyclist except the captain in each team is allocated two cards, the captain having the other four. The cards are valuable in two ways: firstly they can be substituted for one or both dice (the decision to use must be made before throwing), and secondly, using a card forbids following, as long as the player remembers to specify this when playing the card (and it is surprising how often this important little detail is forgotten during the stress of play!).

A third movement modifier is the terrain. All up and downhill sections of the track are marked with numbers from 1 to 6 representing the gradient, with the hills getting steadily steeper as their peak approaches. Any cyclist starting on a numbered uphill square has to subtract the number from his throw. Conversely, of course, on the downhills the numbers are added. In addition there is one stretch of the flat track in such bad condition that it also has numbers to be subtracted.

The fourth modifier occurs whenever the dice thrown – or die plus strength card – add up to seven. In the original game this obliges the player to draw a Chance card, many of which are not only unimaginative (miss a turn) but also often devastating, especially to a cyclist on a tricky bend or near a hilltop. Our gaming group decided early on that they introduced an element of luck quite out of keeping with the spirit of the game, and Derek Carver

Published by Homas Spielen in the Netherlands. Price on the collector's market (if you can find one) is about £50. However, the game is due to be recycled next year by a leading European games company

(often known as the Great Modifier himself) thought out a set of new rules for the seven throw involving a second throw which brings in a small balancing effect, so that a straggler is helped while a front runner is penalised.

The only Chance cards which did meet with our approval were those which indicate a massive fall. This meant that not only had the cyclist drawing it fallen over, but also everyone in immediate contact with him and everyone in contact with *them* and so on. This was too hilarious to dispense with, so if the second throw is a double there is a *massale valpartij,* as the Dutch so eloquently describe it.

Official Score

Scoring is based, I believe, on official Tour systems, with every finisher obtaining points which range from 50 down to 8. In addition there are three Sprint stages which each provide 10, 5 and 3 points for the first three to cross the lines.

Despite the use of dice for movement there is ample opportunity for skilful and tactical play. A cyclist does not have to take his full move, and it can sometimes be worthwhile sacrificing a space or two in order to occupy an advantageous position. A common tactic is to try to manoeuvre two or more of your team's riders so that they are in line together, for 'following' purposes, then at the right moment play one or two strength cards to ensure a massive move for them. the only problem with doing this is that others tend to tag along behind because they know that in those circumstances you will be reluctant to forbid following!

Following becomes extremely important on the hill climbs, especially if your rider has no suitable strength cards left (only the white cards can be used on hills) and he is on a high-numbered space. One can forget, for instance, on a 5 space that there are ten possibilities of throwing 5 or less, in which case your rider falls off and has to re-enter the track from the side, often not an easy undertaking and costly in terms of race position.

It was a sad day for gamers when **Homas Tour** disappeared from the scene, but I gather that there is a possibility of relaunch by another company. Let us hope fervently that this comes to fruition because the game is too good to vanish completely. I certainly hope that if anyone from the company reads this article it will spur him on. Apart from any other consideration it may even have helped to stimulate the prospective market! SP

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GULF STRIKE

Desert Shield Expansion

by Gordon Sweeney and Phil Howell

DESERT Shield is the second expansion to **Gulf Strike**. The previous games sought to test the effectiveness of the US Rapid Deployment Force in its task of securing oil supplies in the face of potential Gulf conflicts involving forces from Iran, Iraq, the USSR and several other Gulf states. This version adds the current Iraqi occupation of Kuwait.

Gulf Strike consists of over 1000 counters (this is a large and complex game!), FIVE maps, the old 60 page rule and scenario book, a tables insert and both expansions. The counters represent groups of naval units, squadron of air units and ground forces which range in size from battalions to divisions. They are very detailed with up to 9 different values (anti-air, anti-ship, electronic counter measures and so on).

Over 50 different aircraft types are present and in addition to its counter values each has a specific ability to detect enemy units at different ranges. The maps are fairly attractive, but the hex and feature alignment between different maps isn't always spot on.

For such a complex game the rules are reasonably well explained although the examples given are basic and don't cover the more involved situations. Given that this is a effectively the third edition there is a high number of errors with an especially muddled order of battle for the Desert Shield expansion itself. Many of the new air units aren't given range characteristics and several units don't even appear in the counter sheets or have different values.

Interaction

The basic game mechanics are untouched. The major strength of the system is a highly interactive sequence of play which allows for plenty of interceptions. Although cumbersome at times, the combat system is very comprehensive and gives rise to realistic results.

At the start of each turn, ground units have to be assigned to either 'front line' or 'reserve' mode, air units to 'offensive' or 'intercept' mode and naval units to 'in port' or 'under way' mode. A unit's mode affects when during a turn it may move and, for air units, which missions it may perform. Striking the right balance here is important. So is supply – while a side may have a plethora of units, it's likely it will only be able to move a few of them due to the supply costs of the missions.

Saddam It

The Desert Shield expansion covers the 'what if' situations of an Iraqi thrust into Saudi Arabia, an Allied move to expel the Iraqis from Kuwait (and possibly Saudi Arabia) and a possible push onto Baghdad itself. New rules cover long range missiles and the Iraqi chemical capability. Some of the special rules are a mess. For instance in the variant dealing with the Allied recapture of Kuwait, five UN negotiation points are scored for each turn that passes without a US unit on Iraqi territory.

Once 100 points are accumulated, the game is deemed to have ended in a negotiated settlement. Given that each turn represents two days, this point would have been reached on 11-12th September 1990! There is no victory point penalty for high Allied losses which seems unrealistic. Also there are no restrictions on bombarding or assaulting Kuwait city itself. Despite the pronouncements of Allied commanders that there will be no restraint on the level of force used, it seems inconceivable that they will destroy Kuwait city while liberating it.

On balance, **Gulf Strike** is only for experienced gamers, preferably with some knowledge of contemporary warfare (ie the roles, abilities and uses of different units) and those with the patience to revise what is basically a fairly inadequate expansion. This game has clearly suffered from its speed of development and in particular the lack of playtesting is quite apparent. SP

Designed by
Mark Herman

Published by
Victory Games

Price £20.45

2 players

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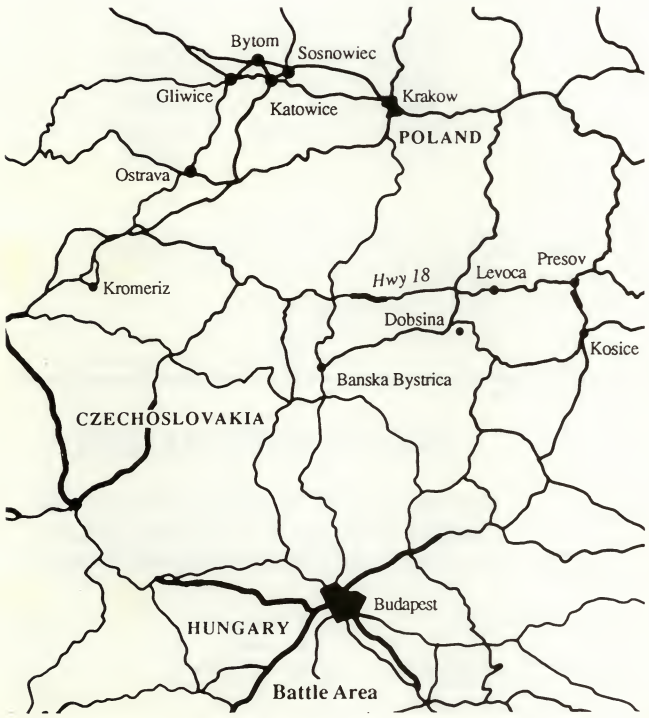
BATTLEFIELD: EUROPE

Modern Flashpoints

by Gordon Sweeney



Designed by
Frank Chadwick

Published by
GDW

Price £19.99

2 players

BATTLEFIELD: Europe is GDW's attempt to cover possible conflicts in the post cold war Europe of the 1990s on a tactical level and is one of a series of games using the First Battle System. It focuses on seven potential flashpoints such as a dispute over ethnic Turks in Bulgaria. The box contains four small maps (that can be fitted together in several ways), three sheets of ½ inch counters representing troops, vehicles and aircraft, two scenario books – one for each player, two sets of charts, four pages of basic rules and a 64 page battle manual (including several background articles and advanced rules).

Battlefield: Europe should have been a good game but it soon becomes apparent that it has been rushed to an unforgivable extent. The box boasts 700 counters – in fact there are only 528. The maps are quite attractive but on two of them the roads and forests have been misaligned with the hex grid. This leads to a few annoying instances in play, such as when a tank pays the forest terrain cost for entering a hex with only one tree in it!

Short Not Sweet

The basic rules left me feeling there was something missing. I had unanswered queries about many things but especially the line of fire rules. It's all very well producing a four page rule book but if it's not comprehensive there doesn't seem much point.

After making some house rules to fill in the gaps, we sat down to play the three scenarios referred to in the basic rules. However, only four of the 10 light infantry required for 'The Village' are present in the game and 'The Poor Bloody Infantry' uses mortars which surprise, surprise are only covered in the advanced rules. At least 'Tank Duel' was playable but without the command control and morale rules was unrealistic and unexciting.

Silly Bonuses

Apart from command control and morale, the advanced game brings in rules on cohesion, spotting, visibility, mines, artillery, reaction movement, helicopters, and fighter/bombers. These add a lot to the game but silly things can still happen. The reaction movement rule in particular can be too powerful in some situations. There are also rules for designing your own scenarios and for running a campaign game.

Combat is handled in a quick and straightforward manner using a standard combat odds table but with each piece firing individually. Vehicles can be 'damaged' or 'destroyed' while troops can be 'pinned' or 'destroyed'. Despite this simplicity, the game can get a little unwieldy as each side can have unlimited troops and four vehicles (with their pinned and damaged markers) in the same hex. This shouldn't occur too often though. The counters show a lot of information – apart from the obvious stuff there are indicators to show the presence of, for example, thermal sights, stabilised guns and composite armour.

Of everything in **Battlefield: Europe** it is the articles in the battle manual that made the best impression on me, especially the background notes to each of the seven flashpoints. With liberal use of maps they explain any historical factors that might lead to conflicts and then go on to outline situations in which they could occur. Although these range from the plausible to the extremely far-fetched they make interesting reading. There is also a section which gives an analysis, order of battle and selected unit organisations for 17 European armies. Finally there is a history of tank development since the war.

Bearing in mind what I've already said about this game's shortcomings, I can only really recommend it to anyone who would want to use all the advanced rules and wouldn't mind tinkering a bit here and there to smooth over the cracks in the system. It offers a good opportunity for such a person to create new scenarios or even a campaign.

Personally, I believe the bottom line must be that when you buy a game like this you have the right to expect a higher level of completeness and consistency than **Battlefield: Europe** offers. Hopefully these deficiencies will not be present in the other games in this series. In any event I wouldn't be surprised to see a 2nd edition **Battlefield: Europe** sooner or later. When it comes I'll certainly give it a look. SP

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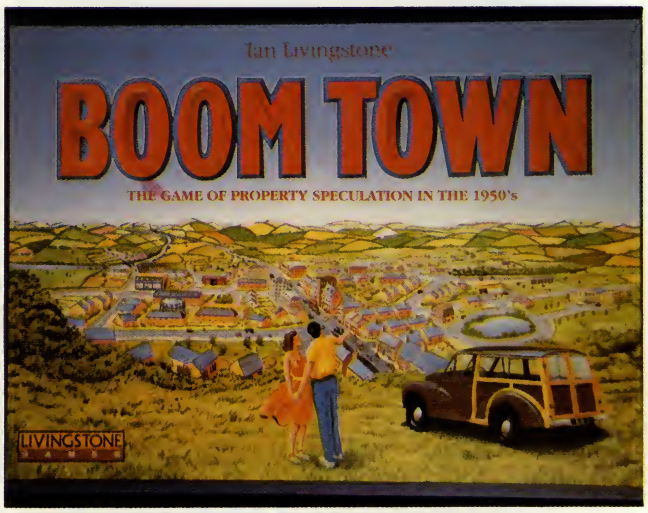
BOOM BOOM!

Designing and selling a boardgame, by Ian Livingstone



SO YOU'VE invented this wonderful boardgame and now you want to see it in the shops and retire off the profits. But what do you do to avoid ending up with a garage full of boxes that nobody wants? I recently launched my own game **Boom Town** and hope that readers will learn from my experiences if they are thinking of going it alone.

Before I go any further, however, I believe the best bet for any inventor is to have the game published by an established games company. Even if the idea of manufacturing your own game sounds attractive, not to mention in line with current entrepreneurial spirit, I would always recommend that in the case of the games jungle, inventors at least try to license it. The reasons are many. Once an agreement has been reached, it is relatively hassle-free. You don't get your hands dirty, you don't have bills to pay or credit to collect, you don't have to worry about the marketing or distribution, and you collect lovely royalty cheques. Like it or not, the success of a boardgame depends almost totally on packaging, advertising, PR hype, marketing and distribution. Whether or not it is a good game is sometimes irrelevant, especially in the UK. You could have produced the best game in the world, but if nobody knows about it, how is it going to sell? If you manage to license your game to one of the major games companies, you can be sure that it will invest in the packaging, spend money on advertising – especially on television if it hopes to sell it into all the main distribution outlets – hype it up in the press and ensure that it is in the shops. But don't get your hopes up too high about licensing your game. A company like **Waddingtons** receives over 4000 prototypes from hopeful inventors every year. And in today's market, the major companies tend not to try anything new, and rely on **Trivial Pursuit** lookalikes, film or TV character tie-ins or formula house-style productions.

The only games that break this rule are rare classics that succeed by word of mouth despite the manufacturer's inability or unwillingness to promote them. But, as I said, these games are rare. **Trivial Pursuit** is the most successful and recent example of a game spreading by word of mouth. Before that it was **Dungeons & Dragons**, albeit to a lesser extent. I was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to be part of **D&D's** success. My old school chum Steve Jackson and I had started **Games Workshop** at the beginning of 1975 hoping, rather naively, to build a games empire out of completely unknown games sold through our fanzine **Owl & Weasel**. Gary Gygax got hold of a **O&W**, sent us a copy of **D&D**, we ordered six copies through which we secured a three-year exclusive European distribution agreement, and went on rather quickly to become a real games company. Since retiring, selling out, being put out to grass or call it what you like two years ago, I had it in my mind to make the kind of games that I now enjoy playing rather than the role-playing games I used to love in my youth (sic). Now **Games Workshop** is another story and the only reason I'm mentioning it is that my experiences there helped me avoid some of the pitfalls and traps while manufacturing **Boom Town**. And this knowledge I hope to pass on in this article.

In my case, I decided that I didn't want to build up another games company like **Games Workshop**. I wanted to produce one title a year in a strictly limited edition and sell them (hopefully) to people who also enjoyed playing general games like those that appear with such regularity in Germany. In targeting my market of collectors and club gamers, a lot of decisions were automatic. I needed a game that was simple to learn yet skilful in play, could be played by up to six players, had lots of player interaction, had a theme with wide appeal and above all had an original game mechanic. I set about designing **Boom Town** with these points in mind. Also in the back of my mind was the idea to try to license **Boom Town** to one of the major manufacturers at a later date, using my edition as a prototype which they could evaluate easily and would be less likely to ignore than a handmade prototype, human nature being what it is – lazy! The final consideration was that I wanted to sell the game in Germany where the market for general games is much larger than it is in the UK. Therefore there had to be no written English on the board and the rules had to be published in both English and German.

The months went by and slowly the game evolved. I liked the idea of a game in which house prices went up and down according to the type of commercial developments and land use that surrounded the houses. At first the players only built the houses, and the commercial developments came about as a result of turning over cards. But I felt that players wanted to have more choice and so I developed the idea that players build both the houses *and* the commercial developments. High on my checklist of what makes a good game is the requirement for player interaction. So I eventually came up with the idea of the Planning Permission Refused card whereby players could object to commercial developments being

built in areas where they did not want them built. Also, without realising it at first, I had introduced an element of bluff into the game because players could, for example, place a -4 Sawmill in an area, have planning permission turned down, but immediately replace it with a -6 Prison! Now I was happy with the game, I set about having it produced.

At **Games Workshop** I was always keen to improve the quality of production of games we manufactured. In the early days, many of the American games were packaged in ziplock bags. This was fine for the avid gamer, but pretty hideous from an aesthetic point of view and unlikely to attract new people into the games hobby. Good artwork and quality components help to make a game more enjoyable and this I wasn't going to ignore. The only problem was that with such a low print run of 1000 copies, it meant that the unit costs would be very high because of the origination costs. Would the market bear the price tag of £25? That's the price it would have to be after the costings were done. I had gone for full colour components, wooden houses from Lorenz in Germany, and the board and box manufactured by Ravensburger in Germany. That's what you call quality, mate!

I timed the print run so that I could release **Boom Town** at the Essen Games Fair in October. The reasoning was that I hoped the game would be well received at the fair and that it would sell well as some 80 000 people would be attending. I would meet the German press, in particular the people editing the very active semi-professional magazines like the excellent *Fairplay*. The remaining games I intended to sell in the UK for the Christmas market through a few specialist games shops like Just Games. I had no illusions that **Boom Town**, at a price of £25, was going to become a runaway mass market phenomenon without the above mentioned advertising, marketing and distribution. After Essen I attended **Mind Games** to promote **Boom Town**. There I met another person who had decided to go it alone. After talking to him for a while I was amazed at how little research he had done before launching his game. He had produced a game (which shall remain nameless) into which he had put his life savings. The theme of the game was of limited appeal, he had printed 5000 copies because that had seemed a good number to him and he told me that he had just assumed that W H Smiths would stock it automatically. I can assure you that unless your game is heavily promoted, no large distribution chain is going to stock it unless you happen to know the buyer. Why should it? There are hundreds of games for the chain to choose from and shelf space is expensive. Even worse, the inventor told me that he was intending to take a stand at the British Toy & Hobby Show at Earls Court. There is a place tucked away on the first floor at Earls Court where they put such people. A few years ago I gave this place the title of Death Row, for here was where the one-man-one-game companies were put. They all expected buyers to come flocking on to their stands but were always sadly disappointed and were seldom seen again. I advised him to cut his losses and not go. Let's hope he manages to empty his garage.

Anyway, everything went more or less to plan and **Boom Town** is nearly out of print. The major companies each have a copy and I hope it will get licensed. Now I am working on the second title for Livingstone Games for release at Essen 1991. But I am not only interested in my own designs. If anybody has invented a game which they think might be complementary to the range, please write to me with details, care of *Strategy Plus*, enclosing an SAE if you want a quick reply! SP

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This is the Official Awards Ballot for the ***Charles S. Roberts Awards*** for calendar year 1990. The ***CSR Awards*** are designed to honor the best in the wargaming hobby and game industry.

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Rodger B. MacGowan

Best Pre-WW2 Board Wargame

Best WW2 Board Wargame

Best Post-WW2 Board Wargame

Best Pre-20th Century Computer Wargame

Best 20th Century Computer Wargame

Best Game Review/ Design Analysis/Play Analysis
(Name Magazine, issue & author)

Best Historical/Opinion/ Variant-Scenario/ Interview Article
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Best Wargame Graphics
(Board, Role Playing, Card, Computer or Magazine graphic design)

The James F. Dunnigan Award
PLAYABILITY & DESIGN ELEGANCE
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(A career award presented to an individual in the hobby or industry for excellence in their field)

Best Professional Wargame Magazine

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Signature Date

Ballot from which magazine, issue #

Please sign and return your ballot to:
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2210 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 239
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Ruled out

I've just received the latest issue of *Strategy Plus* and would like to say that I entirely agree with the review of **New World**. My own gripe about this game is that it is simply too long for the type of player for which it was apparently designed: that is the family gamer. In my experience two hours is considered a monster game to this type of player and as for six hours, forget it! The rules, as you suggest, are horrendous. I may be particularly thick, but I am having difficulty figuring out the rules for Embarkation. They are not very clear, like many of the other rules.

Showbiz: the components for the AH version of this game aren't just poor, they're dreadful. After attempting to play this game with six players I took a Stanley knife to the board to separate the individual player boards, in order to make the game playable, and as for the poxy little counters, they're pathetic. I would rather pay more money and get good quality.

Nick Holliday
Hitchin
Herts SG4 0DA

No bull

An interesting discovery for any Amiga strategy game fans out there is a game on disk 028 at 'Crazy Joe' public domain software. **Bull Run** is a simple but playable American Civil Wargame for £1.50 inc P&P. It is a one screen coloured map and the computer can control either side. You can alter variations of Union arrival ie historical, other set-up. On the whole, great value.

Your magazine is good reading and value and I hope you will increase your Strategy section. Do you have any information on whether SSI has any plans to release any more wargames other than **Dungeons & Dragons** type for the Amiga?

R Howarth
Smithbridge
Littleborough, Lancs

*Thanks for the tip about **Bull Run**. Here is the news from SSI: Ed Beaver, who designed **Revolution '76** and the 'Command Decison' series for Microprose, is working on an American Civil War game for SSI. Gary Grigsby is also hard at work transposing the game system he devised for **Second Front** into a 'War in the Pacific' scenario. Both these games should appear on the Amiga this summer. If you can't wait that long, then how about Gary Grigsby's **Typhoon of Steel**, which has just been released for the Amiga. A full review of this game will appear in our next issue.*

Cheated!

Thanks to Larry Roberts *(issue 3 – Ed)* for his reply to my problem with the 'bug' in **Full Metal Planete**, but unfortunately the situation is now academic. I did succeed in winning the game, despite the presence of Cheater Hijacker, but then the disk became completely unusable and I haven't been able to load the game since. I never knew computers were bad losers. I feel disinclined to write to Infogrames for a replacement as the company didn't bother to reply to my previous letter, despite it being in pidgin English.

Neil Wilson
Horfield
Bristol BS7 8SD

Infogrames has recently opened a UK office. We contacted it and the company immediately offered to send a new disk in exchange for the old one.

Depth charge

The mix of computer and board games is about right for me and I can only say 'Keep up the good work.' The board game review of **World War II: ETO** has certainly made me consider buying the game. I would ask, if possible, that a slightly more in depth review be done at a later date. This is because I purchased the game by TSR when it was first released and found the game quite good, but the naval system was poor and actual game play confusing. It was also very difficult to teach a beginner during play. I wonder if this aspect has been improved.

William Hall
Leigh-on-Sea
Essex SS9 1SX

To give this game its proper due would take up about half the mag! We can say, however, that the rules have been completely rewritten and some introductory scenarios included.

Set for battle

Harpoon update: the 1.1 version that Mirrorsoft retails is the 1.1B (Beta test) version and as you say will not run any of the Battlesets. Three-Sixty in Texas, which manufactures the game, is currently on version 1.2 and this differs in that it uses less memory than 1.1, runs a bit smoother and has a few additional features.

For those people who have not ordered **Harpoon** yet I would suggest buying it direct from America (can be done by phone paying by Visa, Mastercard etc). Three-Sixty also keeps you informed on current updates via a free newsletter (Three-Sixty Inc, 2402 Broadmoor, Bldg B, Suite 201, Bryan, Texas 77802. **Harpoon** hotline (409) 776 2187).

If you have the old version it is worth contacting Three-Sixty to see if it will exchange the discs for an updated version for a small fee.

Iain Borthwick
Croydon,
Surrey CR0 3DW

Mac tosh

One can now buy an Apple Mac Classic for under £600, and a colour Mac (the LC) for under £1500. This brings the Mac range into the same price bracket as PC clones and well equipped Amigas and STs. There is a large number of excellent strategy games for the Mac, such as **Strategic Conquest, Carrier Command, Balance of Power, Guns and Butter, Pirates, Starflight, Harpoon** and, dare I mention, **'Nam 1965-1975**! It is also an excellent machine to program and design games for. Perhaps this is why EA uses the Mac as the basis of its artist's workstation in the US.

Despite all this, the Mac is still regarded as an expensive business machine, or a yuppie desk accessory. It is massively under-represented in magazines and in the shops. I will concede that there are cheaper games machines, and perhaps other computers are more adept at playing games, and no – it does not have a joystick socket (although there are several joysticks available for it). I must argue, however, that it is about time that the Mac was taken seriously as a fun machine, and as such received its fair share of your attention.

Matthew Stibbe
Oxford University

It remains to be seen whether Apple's long awaited low-cost Mac will enable the machine to break out of its rather exclusive niche.

Errata

Our apologies for some of the errors that crept in to last issue's Rebound page. Fritz Bronner's full address is 6137 Case Avenue, North Hollywood CA91606 USA. *The Small Furry Creatures* bulletin board is on 071-358 1613. The 'news story' concerning Amstrad which mysteriously failed to appear was about rumours of a PC games machine due to be launched later this year with an estimated retail price of £400. Amstrad currently denies the machine's existence, but then it would, wouldn't it? SP

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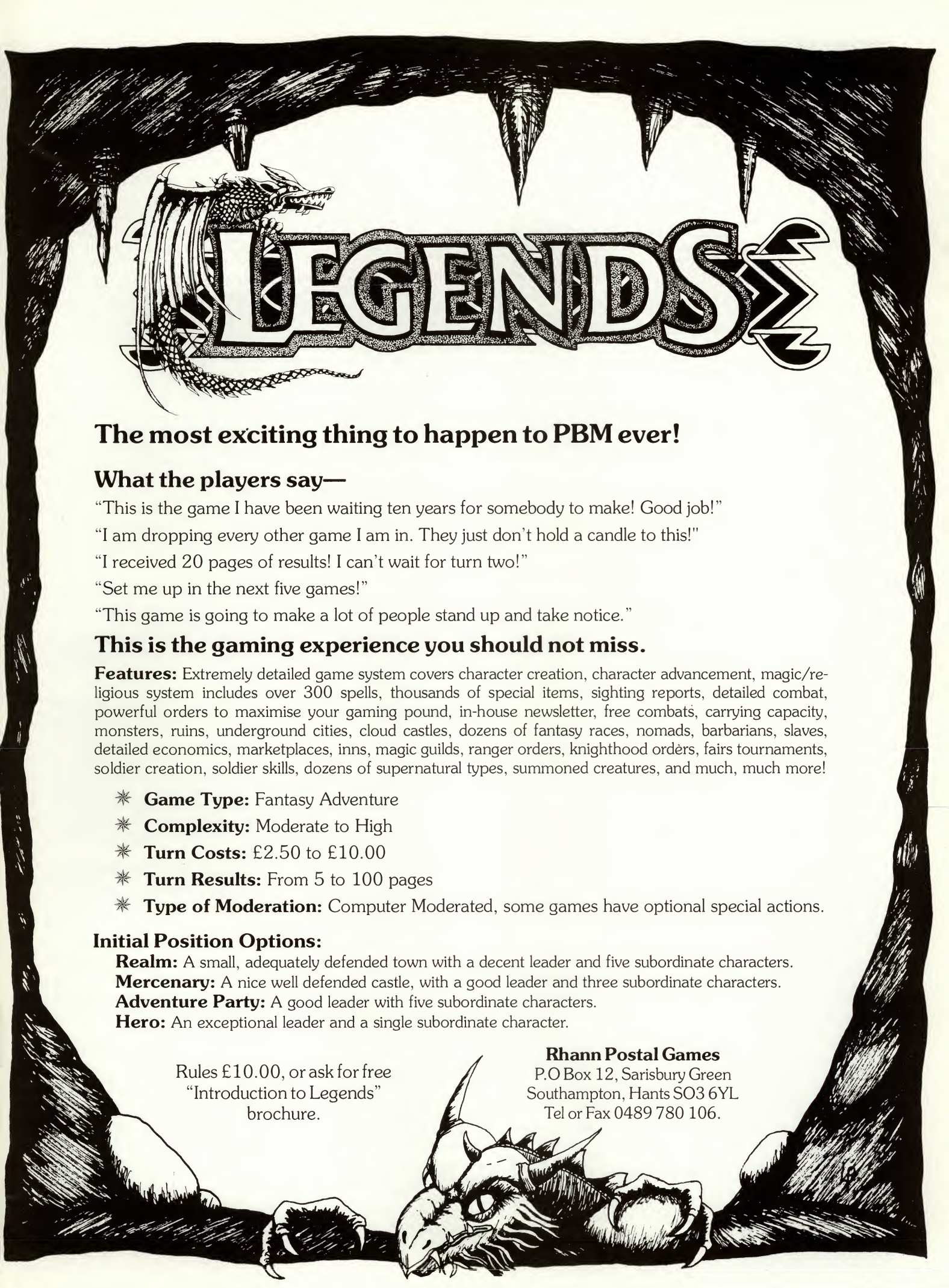

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BOARDGAMES FOR SALE: The Warlord Game (R Williams), **Cosmic Encounter** inc 3 exp sets (Eon), various Yaquinto boxed games, AH classics and 3M games (inc **Challenge Bridge II**). All in mint or near-perfect condition. Wanted: **Energie Poker, Infinity, Mr Who, Dispatcher, Square Mile**. Han Heidema, Stationsweg 24, 2991 RN Barendrecht, The Netherlands.

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WANTED: Is there anybody out there interested in swapping home made but historically accurate scenarios for SSG's **Panzer Battles, Halls of Montezuma, Rommel, Decisive Battles of the American Civil War**, Rainbird's **UMS** and/or SSI's **Battles of Napoleon** for the IBM PC? If so write to P Englund, Gavstavagen 160, S-755 96 Uppsala, Sweden.

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PRIVATE COLLECTOR is still searching for **Homas Tour, Conquest of the Empire, Broadsides & Boarding Parties** etc. Offer a lot of German games in exchange. Dr K Rehders, Fritz-Reuter-Allee 68, D–1000 Berlin 47, Germany.

BOARD GAMES for sale. All in excellent condition, all £7. Waddingtons: **4000AD** (1972), **Formula 1** (1973), **Spy Ring** (1965), **Blast Off** (1969), **Air Charter** (1970). Ideal: **Tri-Ominos** (1968), **Cloak & Dagger** (1984). AH: **UFO** (1978), **Diplomacy** (1976). Yaquinto: **United Nations** (1982), **Marine 2002** (1979) – both mint. Paul Jefferies, 46 Towncourt Lane, Petts Wood, Kent BR5 1EH. Tel 0689 834454. P&P not included.

WANTED: To The Green Fields Beyond (SPI), **War To End Wars** (3W), **Gallipoli** (CCS) for Spectrum computer plus any other World War One games either board, magazine or computer. Quote your prices to Ken Fairclough, 68 Belfast Mead, Lyneham, Chippenham, Wilts SN15 4AQ.

NO INSTRUCTIONS for games bought at car boot sales: **Focus** – Sid Sackson, **Ruff House** – Parker; **Go For It** – Parker. Expenses paid. Thanks. Tony Johnson, 19 Woodland Rise, Wakefield, W Yorkshire WF2 9DN. tel 0924 372352.

FOR SALE: 32 *White Dwarf* mags between 52 and 98. Also *Fantasy Chronicles* 1-8 and *Imagine* 21. Best offer secures. Dave, tel 081-311 6692.

MANCHESTER Board Wargamers Annual Auction will take place at 1pm, Sat 2nd March, 1991, at St Chad's Chruch Hall (near Romiley Station), Guywood Lane, Romiley near Stockport. The event is open to anyone to buy and sell. For details, send large SAE to: 9 Tenby Ave, Manchester M20 9DU. Games can be accepted for auction on the day, but pre-registration, with lowest acceptable bids, is preferred.

APPLE II GAMES. 16 strategy, war and adventure titles, £7 to £10 + postage. SAE for list. D Willard, 17 Ingthorpe Ave, Blackpool FY2 0EL.

FOR SALE 3W's **Aces High** and **Forward To Richmond** both boxed and unused. £3 each post free. Chris Geggus, 46 Ascension Road, Romford, Essex RM5 3RT.

WANTED DESPERATELY any issues of *Games & Puzzles* or complete vols. A Holt, 29 Coventry drive, Prospect Hill, Worksop, Notts S81 0RR.

BOARDGAME KITS: Bannockburn boardgame plus details of other boardgames £1.50. ADP Systems, 37 Powis place, Aberdeen AB2 3TS.

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FOR SALE: Balance of Power (3½"), **Pool of Radiance** (5¼") plus clue book, AH **Circus Maximus** (5¼"), AH **Civil War** (5¼") all IBM. £12.50 each inc P&P. G Lodge, 12 Coltbridge Terrace, Murrayfield, Edinburgh EH12 6AE.

FOR SALE AD&D books, games, 25mm and 15mm figures (historical, fantasy and SF). Send SAE for full list to: G Harrison, 12 Ascott Road, Aylesbury, Bucks HP20 1HX.

PLEASE, please can anybody supply me with, in reasonable condition, complete copies of Games Workshop's **Fury of Dracula** and West End's **Tales of the Arabian Nights**. Quote your prices to Stephen Taylor, Greenways, Cooling St, Cliffe, Rochester, Kent. Also wanted – *Games International* numbers 1,2,3,5,6,7 and 10. *(see ad on this page! – Ed)*

FOR SALE: Bottom Line, Chicago, Executive Decision, Junta, Kings & Things, Magic Realm, Oppression, Save The President, Titan, TV Wars, Ubi, Willow, 1839 and more! All in A1 mint condition or swap for **Energie Poker, Trade, Homas Tour, Mafioso**. Send SAE for complete list or tel 0407 720895.

WANTED: *Command* magazine issues 1,2,3. For sale: SPI, AH, TSR and other games and magazines. SAE for list to R Sandell, 2 Darell Rd, Richmond, Surrey.

AMIGA GAMES for sale: **Gridiron** £10, **Lost Dutchman Mine** (1 meg) £10, **Manchester United** £10, **Batman** £7, **F/A18 Interceptor** £10, **Gold of the Americas** £10 and **Silent Service** £10. Bill Hall, tel 0702 470725.

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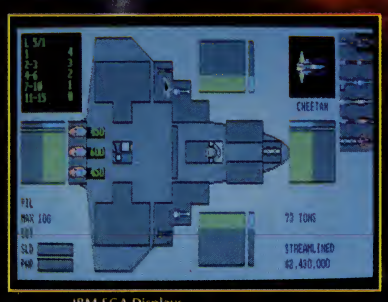

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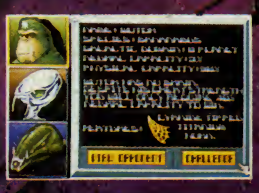

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